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Little Tommy Bounce; OR, Something Like His Dad. By PETER PAD.



"Oh, boss! here's fo'ty-leben robbers in de bahn," he burst out, "an' dey's gwine ter steal all de cows an' hosses, an' all de waggins and eve'ying if yo' don' come putty quick."

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LITTLE TOMMY BOUNCE;

OR,

SOMETHING LIKE HIS DAD.

By PETER PAD,

Author of "A Rolling Stone; or, Jack Ready's Life of Fun," "The Shortys' Christmas Rackets," "Sam Spry, the New York Drummer; or, Business Before Pleasure," "The Shorty Kids; or, Three Chips of Three Old Blocks," "The Jolly Travelers; or, Around the World for Fun," "Jack Hawser's Tavern," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

Boys, did you ever hear of Tommy Bounce?

If you did not, just let me tell you that he was a hustler.

Perhaps, however, you may have read about Tommy Bounce, Jr., at some time.

He was another just such a fellow as his predecessor.

Now here we have little Tommy Bounce, who is something like his dad, and so you know what you may expect.

He was little, but oh! my goodness, couldn't he make things go when he tried!

He was only sixteen, but if his years had been measured by the fun he had, he ought to have been a hundred.

He wasn't more than five feet in his socks, but he was a regular Jumbo, considering the amount of hilarity he was capable of producing.

Not desiring that his son should grow up in ignorance, the paternal Bounce sent Tommy to school at an early date.

At first he went to the schools in his own neighborhood, but there came home so many tales of his son's mischief that Mr. Bounce concluded to send Tommy to boarding school.

It would take longer for complaints to reach him from there, and there might not be so many of them.

Mr. Thomas Bounce did not so much object to his son's cutting up as he did to constantly hearing about his scrapes.

They reminded him too forcibly of his own younger days.

Tommy being something like his dad, offered no objection to being sent away, as he knew he would have all the more fun.

To look at him you would not have dreamed that he could do anything to upset the natural gravity of any one's domestic arrangements.

He was little, he had a studious face, he rarely smiled, never laughed aloud and seemed bent on living a life that would eventually make him a sweet little cherub with pin feathers, sitting on a damp cloud with folded hands and an evanescent smile on his young mug.

Well, Tommy went off to boarding school and that brings us to our story.

Mr. Swish was a gentleman of an economical turn of mind, who kept a large boarding school for boys in a quiet country town, at a considerable distance from New York, and to this establishment was our hero sent, that he might go on with his studies.

Mr. Swish had a big school, and his patrons paid a good price for the advantages which their sons enjoyed at his temple of learning, but for all that he was as stingy an old duffer as you would find in a day's march.

He was tall and thin, and cranky, with a half-starved look, and ran his place on as economical a scale as possible, and yet keep it going, being mean and penurious to the last degree.

He had only two or three assistants, and these

he paid starvation wages, and kept only one servant, though there was work enough to keep six busy, his wife being often obliged to pitch in and help in order that the work might be finished.

The person of greatest importance on the place—next to Swish himself—was Jim Gloom.

Jim was a big, self-satisfied, awfully conceited darky, weighing nearly two hundred and fifty pounds in flesh, and about a ton in dignity and importance.

He was butler, footman, steward, fireman, chambermaid, errand boy, gardener, coachman, cook, man of all work, watchman, scullion, pantryman, carver, janitor, knife polisher, dish washer, general superintendent and factotum extraordinary of the place, having everything to do and no time to do it in, and all on account of his employer's meanness.

We will see more of Jim Gloom as we proceed, so that's enough of him for the present.

The school term had begun when Tommy entered, and all the scholars had started in on their work for the winter.

That wouldn't bother Tommy though, for he could soon catch up to his class when once he had been located.

He arrived late one evening in the town, finding no one to meet him and a walk of four or five miles ahead of him.

Jim Gloom ought to have been at the train, but Jim had too many other things to do, and concluded to let the new boy shift for himself.

"Walk, eh?" thought Tommy, when told how far it was to the school, and that no one had come after him. "Not many!"

Then he hunted up a livery stable and bargained with a man to drive him out to the school.

"Old Swish will pay you," he said carelessly, as he took his seat.

"Well, if he don't, you will," answered the man as he climbed up to the box.

Tommy said nothing, and in a few moments he was driving along the country road toward Swish's place.

They arrived at the house between nine and ten, the boys not having yet retired.

Swish came to the door, and Tommy introduced himself as the driver dumped his trunk down on the piazza.

"H'm, yes, we didn't know as you'd come to-night, or the coachman would have been down to meet you," said Swish.

"I said I was coming," replied Tommy, "and whatever I say goes," all this with never a smile on his sober mug.

"H'm, yes. Where is Jim Gloom, to look after this trunk? Jim Gloom! hi, Jim Gloom!" yelled Swish.

"Heah I is, sah," said the big coon as he loomed up. "What yo' want now?"

"The boy's trunk must be carried in and up to his room. Dormitory No. Six."

"H'm! yo' wouldn' min' takin' hol' wif me,

would yo', boss? I'se drefful weary dis ebenin'. 'Peahs to me, de littler de boy, de biggah am de trunk."

"Perhaps you'd like to have me help you?" said Tommy.

The big nig looked at the little sawed-off, gave a snort and said:

"H'm! much good you'd do. I'd take de trunk and you on top ob it, easy 'nuff."

With that he grabbed the trunk, chucked it on his shoulder and went in with it, Tommy following.

"Two dollars, please," said the driver politely to Swish.

"You want to give me two dollars."

"No, sir; I want two dollars from you."

"What for?"

"Bringing up the boy and his trunk. He said you'd pay it."

"H'm, yes, more'n it's worth. You couldn't make it one?"

"No, sir."

"Why didn't you get it from the boy himself?"

"He said you'd pay it."

"H'm, yes, good deal of assurance. Can you call to-morrow for it?"

"No, sir, couldn't think of it."

"H'm, yes, the boy ought to pay it himself. Hi, you, Bounce! Where are you?"

Some of the boys had come out into the hall, and they were now laughing at something that was going on inside.

This is what it was:

When Jim Gloom started up-stairs with Tommy's trunk the owner thereof skipped upon the banisters and straddled the baggage on Jim's shoulders.

The coon did not notice the extra weight till the boys began to laugh.

"Go ahead, Jim," sang out Tommy, "you said you could carry us both up. You're no good if you can't."

Just then Swish appeared.

"Come down from that trunk, sir!" he shouted.

"Can't do it, sir. Jim Gloom has a contract to carry us both up."

"The hackman wants his fare."

"Well, why don't you pay him?"

"He said you would."

"Yes, but I didn't say so. Ta-ta?"

"G'off dat trunk, young fellah," sputtered Jim, staggering under the load.

"Like to have me help you now, wouldn't you, Jim?"

"Don' you call me Jim, boy. I'se Mistah Gloom."

"Here, here, come down!" yelled Swish.

"Can't do it without falling, sir," and just then Jim reached the landing, and turned the corner out of sight.

So Swish had to pay the two cases; but he charged it in his bill against Tommy's dad, and made it five, to cover interest and cost of collection.

The boys came up to bed soon after that, and

Tommy found himself in with a lot of as jolly fellows as he wanted to know.

"So your name's Tommy Bounce?" said the leader of the dormitory. "Mine is Bob Smiley, or Smiley Bob for short."

"Glad to know you, Bob," said Tommy. "Snake."

"This is Dick Tucker, this Joe Waters, this Sam Sloan, this Harry Jones and this Matt Mayhew."

"Glad to see you all," said Tommy. "I've got something good in my trunk. Suppose we sample it."

"If you carry a sample trunk you must be a drummer," remarked Dick.

"We'll drum you out if you make any more such remarks," said Tommy. "Are these all the fellows of Number Six?"

"That's all just now. There were one or two more, but we fired 'em out 'cause they were cakes. We don't like cakes."

"Don't you? I have some in my trunk, but if you don't like 'em I'll leave 'em there."

"You know what we mean," said Bob. "You know more than you care to tell, I guess."

"Yes, I'm something like my dad, and he was a rattler."

"I knew you were when I saw you going upstairs on that trunk."

"Saved me walking, my son. I don't like to work after hours."

"I guess Jim would like to do the same. He does enough work for six."

"What is he, the coachman?"

"Yes, and the butler and everything else. He waits on the tables."

"Jim needs waking up. I'll tell you how I'll do it," and Tommy whispered something in Bob's ear.

"That's good—immense, in fact, but you won't dare to do it."

"Won't, eh? Bet you the treat for the crowd I will."

"But will you?"

"Course, if you'll help me out."

"To be sure I will."

Meantime the boys, at Tommy's invitation, were pitching into the good things in his trunk and having a regular feast.

Presently a gong sounded and some of the boys got up and began to hastily undress.

"What's that?" asked Tommy.

"Bell for lights to be out. If they ain't out pretty soon Jim will come around and investigate. If any dormitory has its lights going he'll report the fellows."

"He will, eh?"

"Yes."

"Can't you bribe him to keep dark?"

"Why, he's that already. He can't be any darker as I can see."

"Keep mum, then?"

"No; he likes to blab on the fellows, thinks it makes him more important."

"Well, get into bed, you fellows. I'll fix Mr. Jim Gloom."

The boys tumbled into bed but Tommy sat up reading a book under the chandelier.

Pretty soon a heavy step was heard in the hall, and then it stopped just outside the door.

"Hi dere, yo' numbah six fellahs, didn' I tol' yo' I'd 'port yo' if I foun' yo' lights burnin' aftah houahs?"

"That you, Jim?" asked Tommy. "Come in, I want to talk to you."

Jim Gloom came in, looking very mad, and very dignified.

"Look yer, boy, yo' don' wanter call me Jim no mo'. I'se Mistah Gloom, I is."

"Well, sit down, Mr. Gloom, and be sociable. How's your sister?"

"Ain' got no time to fool wif yo', boy. I want dis yer light out right away. Didn' yo' heah de bell?"

"Certainly."

"Don' yo' know wha' dat mean?"

"Somebody calling?"

"No, sah, dat mean to put out de light, and tone in."

"Oh, does it?"

"Yas, it do, an' anodah time ef yo' don' 'tend to it, I repo't yo', undahstan' dat?"

"Oh, we have to go to bed when the bell rings, do we?"

"Suttinly. Didn' yo' see de oders go?"

"Why, yes, but I thought I could sit up as long as I liked."

Jim Gloom looked at Tommy with amazement marked upon his ebony countenance.

"Well, yo's drefful green, you is. Reckon yo'll 'arn suffin' befo' yo's been yer berry long."

"Reckon I will. Well, good-night, Jim; I've got to put the lights out."

With that Tommy jumped on a chair and turned every light out in a twinkling.

"Hi dere! tone up dem lights! I kean't see in dedahk."

Just then a boot struck Jim Gloom in the head and made him see stars.

A slipper carromed against his ear, and a shoe whizzed so close to his nose that he jumped a foot.

The boys had tumbled to Tommy's little racket and were bombarding that coon in fine style.

They located him by the sound of his voice, and he was not wise enough to keep still.

"Hi dere! I repo't ebery one o' yo' fellahs, yo' see now."

Biff!

A pair of soiled socks, rolled into a ball, caught him in the mouth just then and made him feel very tired.

A match, rubbed violently on the seat of his trousers, produced a light, and Jim gazed around him.

The boys were all in bed and apparently sound asleep, Tommy Bounce included.

"H'm! Dat's all bery funny, but I rep't yo' just de same," and Jim Gloom got out of the room before the match had burned down to his fingers.

If he had not, it is quite likely that he would have received another volley.

"He can't report anything," whispered Bob, when Jim had gone. "He doesn't know who did it."

"I see yo' frow dem socks at me, Mastah Bob, an' I repo't yo', anyhow," said Tommy, in such an admirable imitation of Jim Gloom's voice that all the boys were taken in.

"Great Scott! I didn't think he was in here yet," whispered Bob.

Then Tommy chuckled softly, and said:

"Didn't know I was a coon, did you, boys. That's worth a treat, I guess."

"Well, of all things!" muttered the boys.

"Time's up," said Tommy. "Now let's go to sleep."

In the morning, shortly before the boys went into breakfast, Bob Smiley hurried into the dining-room, where Jim Gloom stood at the head of the table, and said excitedly:

"I say, Jim, you want to look out for that little Tommy Bounce."

"Wha' fo' I wanter look out fo' him?" asked Jim, who was dressed in a swallow-tail coat, white waistcoat, and a very high collar, with an immense white tie buckled about it.

He was now dressed to suit his character of butler, and looked very impressive.

"Wha' fo' I look out fo' dat boy?" he asked again.

"Why, he said just now that he didn't care a copper for you, and that he meant to dance a jig right in the middle of the breakfast table."

Jim Gloom was overcome with astonishment.

"He say he dance a breakdown on de table?"

"M-m!"

"Right yer in de dinin'-room?"

"That's it."

"An' all de dishes on it?"

"Of course."

"H'm! I jes' like to see him do dat once."

"Well, you will if you wait," thought Bob.

Just then a gong sounded, and the boys began filing in and taking their places on either side of the long table.

They stood there awaiting the signal to sit down, and at that moment Tommy Bounce came in, the last of all.

Jim Gloom sailed up to the little fellow, all dignity and white waistcoat, and said blusteringly:

"Jes' yo' get up on dat table an' dance a jig. Jes' yo' lemme see yo' do it."

"Get up on the table and dance a jig?" asked Tommy innocently.

"Yas, sah, jes' yo' do dat an' break all dem dishes. Yo' jes' get up dere an' dance!"

"Why, certainly, if you say so."

It was one bound to a vacant chair and one more to the middle of the table.

Then Tommy began to dance the best he knew how, while all the boys stood and stared.

It was a rattling old jig that Tommy danced and he seemed strung upon wires.

"Hi dere! jus' yo' break all dem dishes," cried Jim Gloom, his mouth and eyes wide open.

"All right if you say so," and Tommy began to kick right and left without breaking step.

Cups, saucers, tumblers and plates began to fly in the liveliest fashion.

It was a constant crash and Tommy danced all the harder as the things began to fly.

Jim Gloom was simply petrified.

He stood there with his hands sticking out like paddles, his mouth wide open, his eyes bulging from their sockets and consternation written in every line of his black face.

Tommy continued to shake her up in the highest style known to the tripudary science, while all the boys looked on in wonder.

Presently Mr. and Mrs. Swish entered the room. The lady screamed and the gentleman looked mad.

"What is the meaning of this exhibition, sir?" roared Swish. "Stop that dancing and get down from the table."

Tommy obeyed like a man.

"Now, sir, what do you mean by such outrageous conduct?"

"I was only obeying orders, sir."

"Only obeying orders!" gasped Swish.

"Yes, sir," replied Tommy, never once changing his mild expression.

"Do you mean to tell me that you were obeying orders by dancing on the table and breaking the dishes?"

"Yes, sir!"

"This is outrageous! Who gave you such orders?"

"Mr. Gloom, sir."

Jim's face was a study.

"Mr. Gloom told you to get up and dance on the table and break all the dishes?"

"Those were his very words, sir. He was very emphatic about it, too, and as I had heard that he was the boss here I thought that I must obey him without question."

Oh, how innocent Little Tommy Bounce looked when he said that!

"Oh, you thought that Gloom had everything to say here, did you?"

"Yes, sir, and he was so severe in his commands that I didn't dare do anything else."

Swish was as mad as could be, but he was puzzled too, and did not know what to make of this little new boy.

"Did you tell him to do that, Jim?" he asked, turning angrily to the moke.

"No, sah. I tol' him not to do it."

"Better ask the boys, sir," said Tommy. "I am sure he said, 'Just you get up on that table and dance a jig. Just you let me see you do it!' I'm sure that's what he said."

"He did!" cried all the boys in chorus.

"Co'se I did," said Jim Gloom, "but anybody order know dat I meant he musn' do it."

"He said for me to do it, sir, and I didn't dare do otherwise."

The boys were all grinning, but Tommy kept his face as straight as a string.

Swish looked closely at him but saw only an expression of the blandest innocence.

"H'm, yes," he muttered. "You're either the biggest rascal I ever saw, or the biggest fool."

"Dat boy Tommy Bounce, am de greenes' boy I eber see!" muttered Jim Gloom, in profound astonishment. "He don' pear to know nuffin'."

"And so you really thought that Gloom meant for you to get up on the table and dance?" asked Swish, after giving Tommy another searching glance.

"Yes, sir. He appeared to be a person of such great importance that I thought I must mind him, and he was very decided about telling me what I was to do. Do all new boys have to do that?"

The other boys were forced to laugh in spite of themselves, Tommy's manner was so irresistibly droll when he asked this innocent question.

Swish rapped sharply on the table till the dishes rattled again, and said:

"We will now have breakfast. Gloom, bring in the vlands. Young gentlemen, please be seated."

Jim Gloom was so stumped that he forgot all about giving an explanation of the affair and relating how Bob came to him and said that Tommy intended to dance on the table.

Such an explanation would have put a totally different complexion on the affair, but it was not given, and Swish remained in the dark.

"Neber see such a fellah!" remarked Jim Gloom to himself. "Ob co'se I mean dat he shouldn' do it. I jes' like to see any one do a t'ing like dat. Ain' dat de naterales' way a body could 'spress him s'prise at such a t'ing? Co'se it am. Gorry! but how him did dance, dough!" and Jim was obliged to forget his dignity for a moment and actually chuckle.

"Very strange," thought Swish. "The boy must be an idiot! Looks bright enough, too. Well—well, his father pays handsomely for his tuition, and if he's a fool it isn't my fault. I'll earn my money, I guess, before he leaves here."

The value of the broken dishes was reckoned up and the sum put into Mr. Bounce's bill as sundries, for if the articles were specified there might be an inquiry and a kick, both of which the shrewd Swish was careful to avoid.

The boys all voted Tommy a perfect brick after this, and the occupants of Number Six were more than ever glad that they had him with them.

Tommy was soon fixed as regarded his classes, and then he pitched in so as to carry off the pennant in the spring when the season was over.

He was no slouch at learning lessons, and he attended to them first of all so as to have more time for larks, of which he was as fond as most boys.

Saturday was only a half holiday at Swish's place, for the principal did not like the idea of his teachers loafing all day, and then, he argued, the boys could not get into mischief if they were employed in study.

He did not bother with the school himself on that day, however, but went into town instead to buy supplies, hear the latest news, and see what was going on, being a regular old gossip, and always eager for the latest information, social or otherwise.

The assistant teachers were left in charge on such occasions, and in the afternoon the boys were free to do as they chose, provided they did not go too far away.

The cow had a short rope fastened about her horns, and Jim had hold of one end of this, not being willing to let the animal take her own route.

"Come 'long, boss!" he grunted, leading the way.

Boss wanted to take her own time about it, however, and she put down her head to crop the sweet grass of the lawn which was much preferable to the dry hay upon which she had lately been fed.

The first thing Jim Gloom knew, the rope had slipped over the cow's horns and was trailing behind him, just touching the ground.

"Hi dere, yo' boss, jes' yo' come here," he shouted, going back after the beast.

anyhow," he muttered. "He don' know nuffin' else."

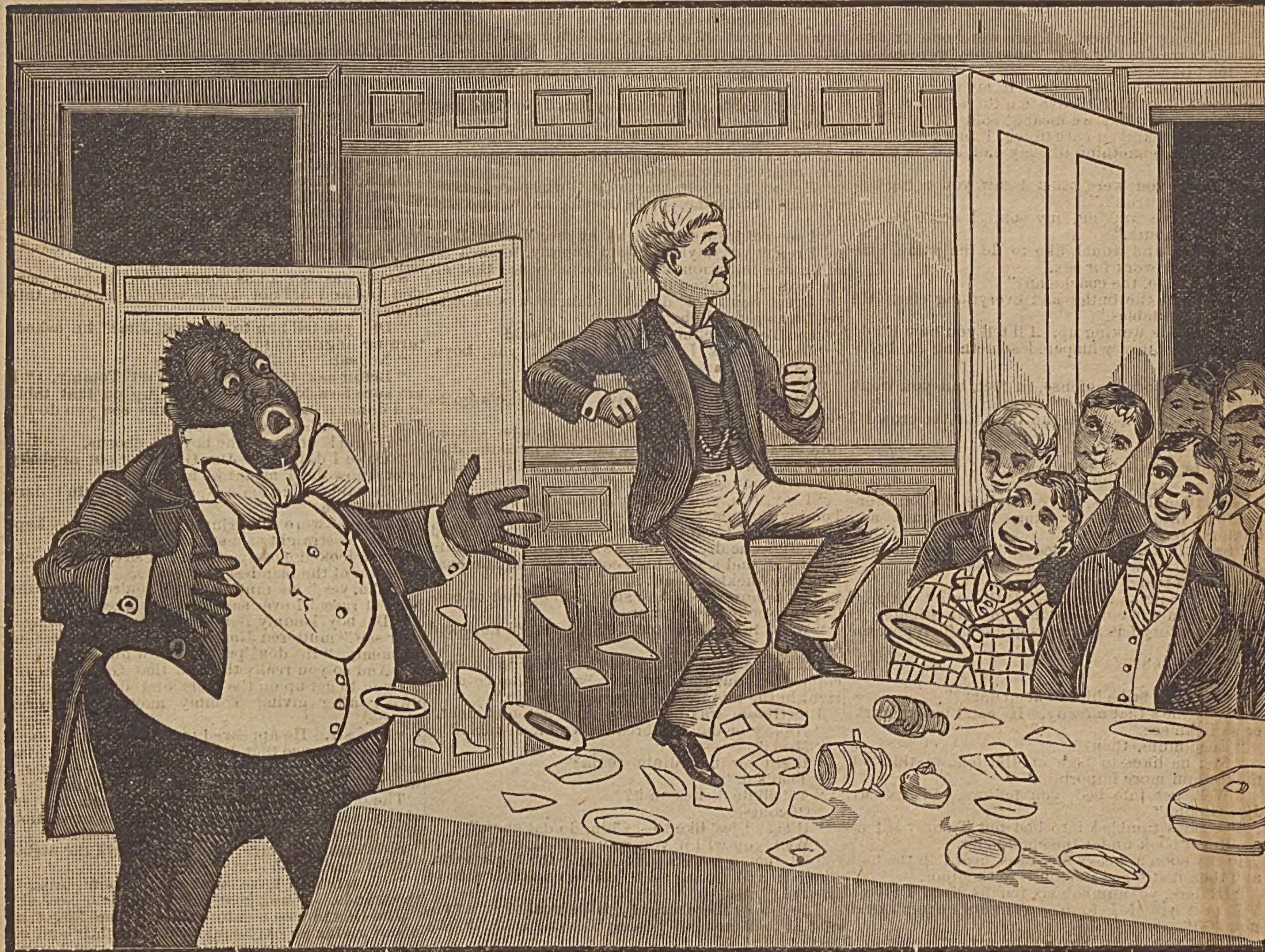
Presently Jim heard the cow raise her melodious voice in complaint, and he looked around.

"Fo' massy sakes! look a' dat!"

There was the cow on the front piazza, steering for the open door, with Tommy Bounce close behind.

"Hi-hi! whar yo' gwine wif dat crittah?" he roared, and when Jim Gloom let out his voice he could make a noise and no mistake.

Mr. Strapper and Mr. Lick, the assistant teachers, were hearing some back number lessons which sundry boys had failed to recite during the week, when they heard a great clattering on the piazza.



It was a rattling old jig that Tommy danced and he seemed strung upon wires. "Hi dere! jus' yo' break all dem dishes," cried Jim Gloom, his mouth and eyes wide open. "All right if you say so," and Tommy began to kick right and left without breaking step. Cups, saucers, tumblers and plates began to fly in the liveliest fashion.

Saturday was a busy day for Jim Gloom, and he was glad enough that the boys were kept in school during the forenoon, for then they could not bother him, as they always did when they had a chance.

When Tommy's first Saturday at the Swish institute came around the little fellow had planned to go off into the woods and locate the best chestnut and walnut trees as a preparation for future excursions when the frosts had opened the burrs and scattered the nuts on the ground.

Much to his disgust, he discovered that his little trip would have to be postponed till the afternoon, nothing having been previously said about the Saturday morning session.

"We'll have to change this arrangement," he mused, but concluded to let matters go on as before for the present.

Jim Gloom was busy taking care of a new cow which Swish had bought and had sent to the place that very morning, after he had started out.

"Dem crumpled horn cows ain' no good," remarked Jim as he led the moolie across the front lawn toward the barn behind the house.

This was a short cut, and Jim was very fond of taking such instead of going around, and if there was a short cut to any job, he was sure to find it.

The cow had other notions, and when the coon approached she tossed her head in a way that meant business.

"G'long dere, an' stop yo' fooling," cried Jim, giving her a whack on the flank with the rope.

She tossed her head and her heels as well this time, and started for the gate.

Just then out came little Tommy Bounce.

He had seen Jim and the cow from a window, and had scented fun at once.

Giving some sort of an excuse, no matter what, he had obtained leave to go out, and here he was.

"Hi dere, boy, jes' yo' help me dribe dat cow into de house!" cried Jim, when he saw Tommy.

"All right, sir," answered Tommy, heading off the bovine.

"Dribe her into de house wheah she belong," cried Jim.

He meant the cow house, of course, but Tommy saw fit to mistake his meaning.

"Get along, boss!" he cried, turning her toward the school-house.

Jim Gloom started toward the back of the house on some other errand, leaving Tommy to take care of the cow, and glad enough to get rid of her.

"Dat boy on'y good 'nuff to take car' ob cows,

Then they heard Jim Gloom's big voice, and knew that something was up.

"What's all that noise about?" demanded Strapper, arising.

Then he went out into the hall followed by Lick and half a dozen boys.

He immediately came face to face with an angry cow, head down and tail up, and a voice as big as Jim Gloom's, raised in vigorous protest.

"Sakes alive! We'll all be killed!" he gasped, backing away.

Those behind pushed forward, however, and there he was between two fires, the cow in front and the crowd in the rear.

CHAPTER II.

A cow in a school-house!

Not a very mild-mannered cow, either, but one of your ugly brutes that want to hook everything they see.

Swish had gone to town on business, leaving Strapper and Lick, his two assistants, to look after the boys.

Little Tommy Bounce had turned loose in the school-house a cow which Jim Gloom was taking to the barn.

At the noise made by the bovine beast in the hall, the two teachers and some of the boys rushed out to see what the matter was.

Mr. Strapper belied his name, for he was a little, weazened, dried up specimen of humanity not much over five feet in height, with a voice that resembled a buzz saw running foul of a nail.

He was at the head of the procession which ran out into the hall, and the first thing he saw was that cow rushing at him with head down and an angry glare in her eye.

"Get back!" he piped up in his shrill voice, trying to retreat.

Those behind, wishing to see what was going on,

Strapper and Lick were left outside with the cow in pursuit.

She came after them with blood in her eye, and matters looked squally for the two teachers.

"Let us in!" thundered Lick.

"Moo!" bellowed the cow.

"Come out o' dere!" cried Jim Gloom, giving her another baste.

"Get out the window," piped up Strapper. "It is our only hope."

At the end of the passage there was a small window two feet square and about five feet from the floor.

This was the only means of escape.

He went in head first, and all over like a diver from a dock.

Fortunately the butt was big enough to allow him to turn in.

His yells were now heard, and the boys ran to the school room windows to see what they meant. Meantime Lick had climbed up out of the cow's way, and sat looking down at the baffled enemy.

"Help!" piped Strapper. "Help, or I will be drowned."

The sight of his colleague in the water butt was too much for Lick's stoicism.

He burst into a roar, and laughed so hard that he lost his balance.



"I'se been aftah de chillen, sah, an' yo' don' know wha' a job I'se had. Had to lebe all my wo'k. an' I'se mos' tuckered out. Mought ha' made up de lot seberal times ef yo'd taken cream-cold or yaller ones, but yo' said mos' partickler dat dey mus' be black."

pushed forward, and Strapper's position became very unpleasant.

Mr. Lick could see over the small assistant's head, but the boys could not and they continued to press forward.

"Moo-oo!" remarked the cow, with a snort and a toss of her head.

Her horns came within one of ripping off Strapper's vest buttons, and he gave a shriek.

"Get back!" he cried, in shrill, calliope tones. "get back or we will all be killed."

"Who let that cow in the house?" demanded Lick, in basso profundo notes. "Where's that lazy Jim Gloom?"

The boys now fell back and gave Strapper a chance, but the cow followed.

"Hi, dere! Yo' get out o' yer," shouted Jim Gloom from the front of the hall. "Don' yo' 'spect I got nuffin' to do 'cept chase yo' up?"

Then he gave the cow a whack over the flank with a whip he carried.

He may have thought he was helping matters along, but he wasn't.

He helped the cow along, though, for she charged on the boys full tilt.

They made a break and got into the school-room, where they promptly closed and bolted the door.

"Drive her the other way!" roared Lick, but Jim Gloom had his own ideas about that.

"G'long out o' dis!" he cried, giving her another belt.

The consequence was that the two teachers were cornered.

"Get on my shoulders and drop out of the window," said Lick to Strapper, "and then I'll face this brute alone."

Just then Gloom grabbed the cow by the tail and tried to pull her back.

That gave Strapper his opportunity.

He lost no time in getting on Lick's shoulders and unfastening the window.

The cow made a sudden bolt, Gloom's grasp slipped from her tail, and she shot forward.

Lick gave a yell and then hoisted Strapper up with a vengeance.

The man with the piping voice shot through that window like a harlequin through a trap.

Splash!

It sounded as if something had fallen into water. And so there had.

Right under that window there was a big hog-head, which received the rain water from the roof.

Just now it received Strapper.

Down he went, not in the water butt, but on top of the cow's back.

She had turned, and was about to charge upon Jim Gloom when Lick alighted on her back.

Then she put as fast as she could trot, and Jim had to dust pretty lively.

"Sakes alive! I neber see sech actions! Don' I hab 'nuff to do wifout habin' to chase cows all ober de place?"

It looked just now as if the cow was chasing him.

Out he went, the cow in full chase.

Lick fell off and landed in the hall pretty well shaken up, but not hurt.

"Neber did see sech goin's on," muttered Jim, when the cow made a break across the lawn toward the gate. "Hab to do all de wo'k on de place—hab all de 'sponsibility ob de hull 'stablishment on my shouljers, an don' hab a minute's peace."

Tommy now caught the cow and led her back to Gloom, who gave her another crack for good luck, and took her off to the barn, using the rope which Tommy had recovered.

"Heah I've been foolin' away half a hour wif dis ornary critter, an' ain' chopped up dat wood nor split de kin'lins, nor took up dem cabbages, nor put straw on de rose-bushes, an' fed de pigs,

and washed de waggin, or made de beds or washed de dishes, or scrubbed de flo' or nuffin'. Wondah when I se gwine to get my wo'k done?"

It was a wonder, indeed.

"I se de o'ny man wha' does any wo'k on de place, anyhow, an' if I is taken away, den ev'y-thing goes wrong. Drat dat cow! I cut her up fo' beef ef she was mine, dat wha' I do, bery sudden."

It may be mentioned that our friend Jim, in the garden or around the stable, was not at all like the same Jim Gloom in the dining-room.

He now wore big cowhide boots, a pair of blue overalls with a bib, a straw hat, and a gray flannel shirt.

These were his working-clothes, worn only when outdoors, and made him look like a totally different fellow from the man in the swallowtail and white waistcoat.

Jim had scarcely reached the back of the house when he was called upon to rescue Mr. Strapper from the hoghead.

"Wall, I declar', ef dere ain' mo' wo'k fo' me. Wha' fo' dat little bantam go fall into de watah fo'? Some folks ain' got no sense 'tall."

However, it was his duty to pull Strapper out of the butt, and he did so, lifting him out as though he had been a kitten, and setting him on the grass.

"Dere! don' yo' fall in dere again, sah, fo' I mightn't be roun' to help yo' out de nex' time. I se got too much to do to look aftah dem jobs."

"No impudence to me, sir," shrieked Strapper, in steamboat whistle accents. "You ought to know your place, sir, and keep it."

"Know my place!" snorted Jim Gloom. "H'm! if I was cut up in fo'ty leben pieces I couldn't spread mysef' round nuff to cover de places I se s'posed to be in. I se in de kitchen and de dinin'-room and de gyarden and de bahn and de stable, an' down to de willage, an' up garret an' down sullen an' eve'ywheahs, leastwise dey 'spects me to be. Wondah dey don' ax me to took one ob de classes de nex' ting! 'Specs I does it's well as some oder folks."

With that the angry factotum walked away, leaving Strapper to get into the house alone, all dripping.

There was very little discipline in the school-room during the rest of the session, and Strapper and Lick were glad enough when Jim Gloom rang the first bell for luncheon.

The boys had the rest of the day to themselves, and enjoyed it as only boys can enjoy a holiday.

Tommy and his chums went off into the woods, and Jim Gloom was not bothered with them as he feared he would be.

The next day was Sunday, and those who cared to go into town were allowed to go, under Jim Gloom's care, it being the rule that they must attend service somewhere, either in town or at the school, where an itinerant preacher generally held forth.

In the afternoon the boys were free to go where they chose, though they were required to be in by six o'clock, after which time they were not allowed outside of the grounds.

"Sunday is not such a bad day," said Tommy, to Bob and Dick.

"No?" said they in surprise, expecting, from Tommy's serious mug, that he was going to preach a sermon.

"No, for it gives a fellow a good chance to think up some snaps for the week," answered Tommy, as soberly as before.

"Oh!" said Bob.

"You're a cure," added Dick.

"For the blues?" suggested Tommy.

"Yes, and for low spirits."

Things went on in the usual way for a few days, and then Tommy thought of something new and strange.

He could take off Strapper's piping voice to perfection, and had fooled the boys with his imitations of it upon several occasions.

At first he had done the thing for fun, but finally it suggested a dandy snap to his active mind.

Saying nothing to his cronies in Number Six, he remained awake one night until all hands were asleep, and then made his way up to the room in the loft where the big coon slept.

Jim Gloom had not gone to sleep, although his light was out, and Tommy could hear him muttering to himself.

"H'm! nice t'ing dis is, dat I can't go to sleep aftah a lahd day's wo'k, an' when I's 'spected to get up at six o'clock, make de flahs, get de breakfast, put on my togs an' wait on de table. Specs I stay awake all de night jes' when I want'er git—"

"Jim Gloom! Hi, there, you, Jim Gloom!" cried a squeaky voice, "are you awake?"

"My gracious! am dat yo', Mistah Strappah?" cried Jim, starting up.

"Are you awake?" piped up the same voice.

"Co'se I is, wuss luck. Wha' yo' wan' dis houah ob de night?"

"I forgot to tell you that the professor wants you to do something for him in the morning right after breakfast."

"Yas, I bet he do. He'm allus wantin' me to do suffin'. Don' hab no time to do my reg'lah wo'k 'tall."

"He wants you to go and get him a dozen little colored children and bring them to the school."

"Col'd chillens, Mistah Strappah?"

"Yes, and little ones not over seven or eight years old."

"Does him wan' reg'lah black niggahs, or will de coffee-col'd ones do, sah?"

"No, they must be black—the blacker the better."

"Bofe kin's?"

"Yes, boys and girls—a dozen all told."

"Wha' fo' he want so many little niggahs, Mistah Strappah?" asked Jim, very much puzzled.

"He's going to give them presents, and have them speak some verses or sing something."

"Gracious me! Dem little niggahs don' know 'nuff."

"Oh, if they know anything they will do. Don't fail to get them, if you have to go all over town. He's very particular."

"What struck him to gib presents to de coons?"

"Don't know, unless he's trying to get the colored vote."

"Wha' fo' he want dat, Mistah Strappah?"

"Why, he's running for selectman."

"Yo' don' say!"

"Yes. Don't neglect this thing now, for old Swish is very particular about it. You'll go right after breakfast?"

"Yas, sah, and take de carryall. De buggy won' be big 'nuff. Bettah hitch in de mules 'cause dey kin pull de mos'."

"All right. Good-night."

"Goo'-night, sah. I tend to it de fus' t'ing."

Then Master Tommy crept back to the dormitory and tumbled into bed without any of his chums knowing of his absence.

Jim Gloom was completely taken in and puzzled over the thing till he fell asleep, wondering again and again what fit had taken old Swish that he was taken with this sudden spasm of generosity.

The next morning after breakfast Gloom did not wait for further orders, but put on his riding suit and started out.

He wore an old black plug hat with a cockade on the side, a light-weight checked ulster that came to his heels, and a pair of top boots much too big for him.

Oh, he was a dandy coachman, he was, and it was a wonder that some rich family did not snap him up for the elegant appearance he would make.

"Don' know wha' fo' de boss wan' me to run aftah dem lilly niggahs when I se got so much wo'k to do," he growled, as he got on the box, cracked the whip over his team of mules and drove off.

It wasn't a very easy thing to catch a dozen darky children, and little ones at that, and Gloom soon found that he had a bigger job on hand than he supposed.

Some were too big and some were too little, some could not be spared and some whom he expected to find had moved away.

One big wench who was not very well acquainted with Mr. Gloom declared that it was a kidnapping scheme and threatened to scald the coon if he did not light out.

"Orter be 'shamed ob yo'sef, trying to steal dem chillun," she cried. "Yo's got fo' or five in de waggin now. Wha' yo' wan' ob any mo'."

"Dem chillun is all right, mist'ess, an' dey won' no trubble come to dem, I tol' yo'. De fessor am a kin'-hahted man, an' he sen' all dem chillun home des' loaded down wif presents."

"G'long wif yo', or I frow a tub o' bilin' hot watah all ober yo' berry sudden."

"Yo' know any ob dem chillun, mistess?"

"No, sah, I don', fo' if I did I tell deir mudders putty quick wha' kin' ob a man yo' be. G'long wif yo' or I call de dog."

Then Gloom went away and drove to a house two or three miles away where he knew of some little darkeys just the size he wanted.

Here he picked up one and was directed to a house a mile further, where he could get some others.

Meantime, at the school, things did not get on at all well.

Mrs. Swish called her husband out of the school-rooms several times, wanting to know what was to be done about the dinner.

"That lazy Jim has gone off somewhere," she said, "and not a thing has been done."

"Oh, he'll be back," said Swish.

But he did not come back.

Then Madam Swish had to hustle.

She put over a big joint of corned beef to boil, piling in cabbages, potatoes, carrots, beets and a bit of pork, all in the same pot.

Jim Gloom would have gone crazy if he had seen that.

The potatoes were not peeled, and the lady did not take the trouble to skim off the fat which arose but let her boil right on, till the house was filled with the odors of a boiled dinner.

Then she had to set the table and make the beds and do a lot of other things besides, all of which were generally performed by the big coon.

Then Swish had to carve and made a very poor fist at it, cutting the meat in chunks, while Mrs. Swish piled up the plates with a lot of miscellaneous vegetables.

"I'll discharge that nigger when he comes back," sputtered Swish, who now discovered how valuable Jim was.

It had got to be after two o'clock, and no Jim Gloom had appeared, when suddenly the door of the big school-room opened and in he walked.

He was hot and tired and dusty, his high ha was battered and muddy, his whip was worn to a stump, and the tails of his ulster were all frayed at the edges.

After him came a dozen or more young coons, and a mighty interesting collection it was.

There were little bow-legged toddlers in pinafores, long legged girls in aprons and short dresses, chunky boys in knickerbockers and copper toed shoes, young lumps of ebony in their fathers' clothes, cut down, and one or two in slippers.

There wasn't one of them on whom charcoal would not have made a white mark, and the kink of their wool was something to make your eyes ache.

One or two were neatly dressed, but the majority wore misfits, their garments being either too little or too big.

One leggy girl of ten carried a baby weighing nearly twenty pounds, that looked like an infant gorilla, and had a mouth like a cave which it frequently opened to let out a yell.

Every blessed coon had a grin on it that would have melted iron, so warm and expansive was it, and all had shiny eyes, white teeth, and beefsteak lips.

"Heah I is, boss!" cried Jim Gloom, triumphantly, as he ushered in the juvenile mob. "Heah's dem chillen—nicest lot ob pickaninnies yo' eber see!"

"Good grief! what does all this mean? Where have you been? What are you doing with all these children?" cried Swish in amazement.

It was a complete surprise to the boys, and they grinned as broadly as the coons themselves.

"I se been aftah de chillen, sah, an' yo' don' know wha' a job I se had. Had to lebe all my wo'k, an' I se mos' tuckered out. Mought ha' made up de lot seberal times ef yo'd taken cream-col'd or yaller ones, but yo' said mos' partickler dat dey mus' be black."

"What are you talking about?" howled Swish.

"'Bout de chillen. Heah, yo', Jane B'n'n Susa Jackson, come out o' dat desk, Wash'ton Brown, stop kicking dat bench, stan' up heah all yo' chillen an' let de boss look at yo'. Ain' dem nice chillen, boss? Yo' can't foun' a bettah lot ef yo' hunt all de week."

"But what did you want to bring them here for? This isn't a colored orphan asylum or a menagerie."

"Didn't yo' say I sh'u'd brung dem yer, boss? I se on'y 'beyin' o'dahs, dat's all."

"I told you to bring them!" repeated Swish, with a shriek.

"Yas'r, dat's wha' Mistah Strappah done tol' me las' night. He say yo' want I sh'd go right away aftah breakfast an' fetch dem chillens. Didn't spect it'd took me so long, dough, an' all my wo'k awaitin'."

Strapper now took his turn at being astonished.

"I never gave any such orders," he piped up.

"Seuse me, sah, but yo' did," said Jim Gloom.

"Don' yo' 'membah comin' to my room las' night an' tellin' me all 'bout it?"

"Nobody gives orders but me in this house," said Swish, with his highest and mightiest air. "You ought to know that, Mr. Strapper."

"But, my dear sir, I—"

"S'pose I go way an' leabe all my wo'k hangin' ef I didn't tink de boss mean business? Co'se yo' tole me to do it, else I wouldn'."

"But, Mr. Swish, I didn't leave my bed—"

Here the coon baby became alarmed by the shrill tones of the puzzled assistant, and began to yell at the top of its lungs.

Its custodian got scared and dropped it on the floor, when it yelled louder yet.

Then all the other coons, thinking that something dreadful was about to happen, began to blubber and cry as loud as they knew how.

The boys all shrieked, and the din was terrific.

"Good Heavens! has Bedlam broken loose, or what?" howled Swish. "You'll set me crazy in a minute!"

CHAPTER III.

A DOZEN little niggers yelling for all they knew how, forty boys laughing and giggling, one darky baby discounting the lot, and three professors pounding and yelling made Swish's school-room the liveliest sort of a place.

Jim Gloom had lugged in a dozen darky children from all over town, and now they did not know what was to become of them, and yelled accordingly.

It all came out of a little racket that Tommy Bounce had played upon Strapper and Jim Gloom, and of which none of his chums knew the first thing.

"Give all them young monkeys presents?" he cried. "Well, I guess not! Take those brats away! What made you bring them here in the first place?"

"'Cause yo' done tol' me to, boss."

"I never did."

"Mistah Strappah done come to my room las' night an' tol' me dat yo' wanted 'em."

"No, sir, I didn't!" shrieked Strapper. "I didn't leave my room last night."

The little coons now began to yell again and Swish was nearly wild.

"Well, well, take 'em away anyhow. I don't care if he did tell you. You know you never take

the wagon more than once, for they scrambled out and ran away as fast as he chucked them in.

Before the job was finished, school had been dismissed, and out came those forty boys, all ready for a lark.

They made a raid on the wagon, stole the kid, and gave poor Jim Gloom another chase to get them back.

"Fo' de Lor sakes, young ge'men," he said, at last, "do lemme get away wif dese lilly brats, or I don't know how I'se able to get yo' breakfasts in de mo'nin'. Take me all night to deliber dese yer niggers."

The boys were compelled to laugh at this earnest



Every boy held up an empty plate while all sang out in chorus: "Say, Mr. Gloom, ain't you going to give us anything to eat?" It was a wonder that he did not drop that tray, smash all the cups, and scald his big feet with the contents. He put down the tray and looked at the boys in blank surprise.

Well, here were the kids, and what to do with them puzzled Swish the worst way.

"Take 'em out!" he howled. "I don't want 'em and never did."

"I don't know anything about it," cried Strapper, in his top-story voice, "and I never heard about 'em till this minute."

"Dump 'em all into the water-butt and drown 'em," suggested Lick in stentorian tones. "That's the best thing to do."

"De idee ob takin' me 'way f'om my wo'k, sen'-in' me all roun' de country, an' den sayin' yo' don't wan' de chillun when I brung 'em," sputtered Jim Gloom. "Somebody else got to tote dem chillun home, 'kase I won't—so dere now!"

All these various remarks were made at once, and it would have taken a lightning short-hand writer to have got them all down.

The whole thing was cake and pie to the boys, and they giggled like a whole army of old maids. "Silence!" said Swish, sternly.

Then all the little coons began to cry, each in a different key, and the din was frightful.

"Shet up, yo' kids!" commanded Jim Gloom.

"De boss am gwine ter gib yo' all a present."

That was too much for the penurious Swish.

orders from anybody but me. Take 'em out, I say."

"Get out o' yer, chillun, de boss don't want yo'," said the big nig, hustling those little darkies out of the room.

It was no easy task to corral twelve lively coons and Jim had his hands full.

The kids were there and they meant to stay. However, when Swish and his two assistants went for them with rattans they concluded to dust, and then Jim Gloom had another job.

Once they got outside, the coons did not want to get into the wagon, and Jim had a nice time catching them.

"I declar! ef dem little niggers ain' mo' trouble dan a lot o' pigs! Hi, dere, yo' chilluns, jes' yo' get inter dat waggin, or I take an' leabe yo' behin' fo' de boss to cut up wif him whip."

That went down with some of them, and Gloom piled them into the wagon, but the rest did not scare a little bit.

He went racing around after them, capturing one at a time and getting into a terrible sweat over it, for it was no joke for a big fellow like him to fly around in that style.

He had to put two or three of the youngsters in

appeal, and the young nigs were forthwith dumped into the carryall and Jim Gloom drove off.

It did not take him as long to deliver the coons as it had taken to collect them, but he had nearly as much trouble about it.

One old mammy had told her neighbors that Jim Gloom was a kidnapper, and that they would never see their darlings any more, like the famous Nellie Grey of ancient fame.

All Darkeyville was aroused, and at the first house Jim Gloom visited he found several able-bodied colored gentlemen waiting for him with clubs, razors and other convenient weapons.

They relieved him of his entire load of colored goods at once, and expressed a desire to relieve him of his surplus flesh as well.

"I jes' like ter cyarve yo' inter lilly bits, nigger," declared one irate African. "Wha' fo' yo' tote dem chillen away, h'm?"

"Yo' got mo' gall dan ten tukkeys, sah, yes yo' hab," said another Jim Crow, with wrath in his eye and a club in his fist. "Whar dem presen's yo' promise de chillun?"

"It am all a mistook, folkses," said Jim Gloom. "I done been tooken in myse'f on dat business, but yo's de chillun, an' I'se pow'ful glad yo' took um off m' han's so soon."

"Le's pallyze dat nigger," cried a dandy coon away in the rear.

There was a rush toward the wagon, and it looked squally for Jim.

However, he was too important a person to be easily frightened.

He got down from the wagon, swelled himself up to his full size, frowned until it looked as if a heavy shower were coming, rolled up one sleeve of his big coat, snapped his whip and remarked in no gentle tones:

"Come on, de hull ob yo', an' yo' bettah sen' fo' de neibahs, too. Ef dey is any pa'lyzin' ter do, reckon Jim Gloom kin do as much as de nex' man."

Then he gave his whip a crack and knocked off the plug hat of a fellow six feet away.

The committee concluded to adjourn *sine die*.

There wasn't a nigger within forty feet of Jim Gloom in less than ten seconds.

"Don't talk any sech fool talk to me, ge'men," muttered the big coon, as he got into the wagon and took up the reins. "Neber talk business 'less yo' mean business. G'long dere, mules."

The moment Jim Gloom got started the trouble began.

Those angry nigs would not face him in his wrath, but they could make it extremely hot for him as soon as his back was turned.

They sent their cards after him in the shape of stones, mud, rotten eggs, clubs and decayed vegetable matter as soon as he got under way.

The wagon looked as if it had been through the wars, inside of half a minute.

The window in the rear was smashed, the curtains were spattered, the top nearly knocked off, and Gloom himself got a dose that made him look as if he had been swimming in a swill tub.

This was pretty tough on that coon's dignity, but he knew that if he went back and licked his assailants he would only get it just as bad again the moment his back was turned.

"G'long dere, muel!" he shouted, hitting the off mule a crack with his big whip.

A stone took the other one on the flank, up went his heels against the dashboard, and Gloom thought everything was going to pieces.

However, both steeds settled down to business after that, and the mob of yelling darkies was soon left behind.

It was after five o'clock when Jim got back home and put up his team, and he had to hustle to have things ready by supper-time.

"You had no business to go off like that, all day, and leave your work, you lazy creature," sputtered Mrs. Swish, who was making biscuits when Gloom came in.

"Gorry, mist'ess, ef de boss done send me off, I kean't help it. Reckon I hab to wo'k hahd 'nuff now, wifout givin' me any mo' to do."

"He didn't send you off, you went on your own account and just got up that story of the colored children as an excuse. I know you!"

"Lor' sakes, mist'ess, dat am allus de way. De mo' a man wo'k, de mo' he kin an' get no t'anks fo't, nudder."

"Don't you talk back to me!" snapped the lady. "I won't have it. There, you can put those biscuits in the oven, and look out that you don't let 'em burn."

With that Mrs. Swish sailed out of the kitchen, leaving Gloom petrified with astonishment.

"H'm! don't let dem cakes bone, h'm? Reckon she might 'tay an' look arter dem 'shese'f, 'stead o' jawin' me. Dere's de dinner dishes to wash, and de table to sot, an' de cows to milk, an' de meat to cyarve, an' de buttah to fetch, an' de Lor' knows what else dey ain', an' dat ol' woman she done say I'se lazy. H'm! I don't hab no time to be lazy, wif flinkin' ob all de tings I gotter do an' keepin' my min' on 'em. Lazy! H'm! dis place jes' go to rack ef I isn't roun' to look arter it."

That night when the boys went to bed little Tommy Bounce proceeded to unfold to his particular chums a neat little plan that he had arranged.

"When everything is quiet we boys must slip down to the pantry," he said, "and collar enough plates to give every boy one."

"Jim Gloom will miss 'em," said Dick. "He knows just how many there are."

"We will take dinner plates, my boy. Jim Gloom won't be looking for them at breakfast."

"Well, and what then?" asked Bob.

"Then we must spread around to the other dormitories and supply our friends at the same time, giving them the proper points."

"And what might they be?" asked Joe, who liked to be posted before he was ready to carry out a joke.

It did not take Tommy long to explain his little joke, and all the boys approved of it.

"That's immense!" said Bob.

"Takes the biscuit," remarked Dick.

"Collars the cruller," observed Joe.

"Scoops out the laundry," asserted Sam.

In fact, they all had something to say about it, voting it the best thing yet.

When silence had settled down over the house those boys stole out of the dormitory in their night shirts and stockings and sneaked down to the pantry.

Tommy had a stump of a candle, and this gave the boys all the light they required.

Four or five plates apiece was not much of a load to carry, and when each had his share, they crept back again and divided the plates among the boys in the other rooms.

Jim Gloom slept pretty soundly that night, owing to his exercise of the day before, and when he awoke he had to jump around pretty lively in order to have breakfast ready.

He had hash to make, coffee to grind, biscuits to knead, oatmeal to boil and eggs to cook, besides sweeping the dining-room, setting the table and putting on his dress suit.

He made his coffee, browned his hash and had everything ready in time, but he forgot all about his dress coat.

He must have had to hustle to forget that, but the fact of the matter was that Swish was too sick to come to breakfast, and his wife had to look after him and could not assist Jim.

Instead of his usual dizzy rig he wore a cook's white cap and apron, and a short jacket with holes in the elbows, and, of course, lacked all of his customary dignity.

He did not discover the mistake until the boys had come into the dining-room and taken their places.

The suppressed titters which he then heard made him look at himself, and thus he was reminded of his shortcoming.

"My gracious me! habn't put on my close, bressed if I hab," he muttered, as he hurried to the kitchen. "Habn't got time now. Neber min', de boss ain't yer, an' anyfing am good 'nuff fo' dem boys."

Taking a huge platter of browned hash in one hand and a mountain of biscuits in the other, he returned to the dining room, set down his load and proceeded to help the boys.

It was the rule that no one must begin to eat till all had been served, and upon this occasion the rule was strictly observed.

Having helped each boy to a liberal supply of hash, a couple of biscuits and a fried egg, Gloom went back to the kitchen to get the coffee.

When he went out each boy had a well-filled plate in front of him.

Each boy had also an empty plate on his lap, out of sight.

This was Tommy's little racket.

The instant the big coon left the room, the clean plates came up.

The full ones took the places of the others, in the boys' laps, the movement being accomplished with elegance and dexterity.

When Jim returned carrying a big tray containing cups of coffee, there was a sudden outcry.

Every boy held up an empty plate while all sang out in chorus:

"Say, Mr. Gloom, ain't you going to give us any-thing to eat?"

It was a wonder that he did not drop that tray, smash all the cups, and scald his big feet with the contents.

He put down the tray and looked at the boys in blank surprise.

Each held a clean plate toward him, and each made the same request.

"Won't you give us our breakfast, Mr. Gloom? We're hungry."

An opera chorus could not have said it with greater precision or with more regard to time.

It was a wonder that Jim's big cap did not lose all its stiffness.

Forty clean plates, forty hungry boys, and forty shrill voices all appealing to him at once.

No wonder that he looked astonished.

"Please, Mr. Gloom, give us something to eat," said the boys all together.

"I done gib yo' each a plate ob hash an' a aig dis bery minute."

"Where are they now?" asked little Tommy Bounce.

He was the most innocent-looking of the lot, and Gloom would consider his remarks when he wouldn't listen to the rest.

The big coon looked at Tommy's plate, but did not see the one in the little rascal's lap.

The table-cloth hid that.

"Didn't I jes' gib yo' suffin'?"

"That plate doesn't look like it, does it, Mr. Gloom?"

It did not for a fact.

"Didn't I gib none o' yo' young ge'men suffin'?"

"No, sir," said all hands, holding up their plates. Jim Gloom was all used up.

The plates were as clean as hot water and soap could make them.

For all that he was willing to swear that he had filled them not five minutes before.

However, here was the evidence.

"Wall, you'll hab to wait a minute, young ge'men," he said, as he passed around the coffee. "Clar to goodness I fought I helped yo' lib'ly not fo' minutes sence."

Then he went out into the kitchen.

There was the plates that the hash had been on, there the one which held the eggs, and there the biscuit plate.

All were empty, and only enough grub was left for Gloom's own breakfast and for the teachers.

"Ef dat don't beat all!" he remarked. "Weil! dey ain' nuff ter go roun' now, an' I hab to get up a new breakfus'."

"Wondah ef de dogs could ha' sneaked in when I was serbin' de coffee?" he muttered as he began to hustle around. "Dat am de queeres' fng I eber did see."

"I know what am de reason! It am 'cause I done keep on dis wo'kin' suit an' didn't put on my reg'lar dinin'-room close. Dat am it, sho's de gos-pull!"

"Clar' to goodness! I neber knowed dem signs to fail. Sho's I fo'git to put on my reg'lar tings suffin' happens. Gorry! what a meal dem dogs mus' hab, wif all dat hash an' dem aigs. Reckon dey get de indigestium and holler wuss'n eber to-night."

He was flying around so as to get things ready and not keep the boys waiting, when the sharp click of a call-bell was heard.

"Wondah who 'm dat? Kean't be de boss. He'm sick. Reckon de teachah's come down dis mo'nin', 'cause de fessah am sick."

Going back to the dining-room, he found that Mr. Strapper was sitting at the head of the table and that he had rung the bell.

"I will take my breakfast with the boys this morning, Gloom," piped up the under-sized tutor.

"Mr. Swish will not be down."

"Yas'r, soon's I kin git it ready, sah. De break-fus' done meet wif a acciden' dis mo'nin' an'—"

Jim Gloom suddenly caught sight of the boys. They were all filling up on hash, fried eggs, biscuits and coffee, and doing it well, too.

"Can I have another biscuit and some coffee, Mr. Gloom?" asked that guileless Tommy Bounce.

Jim Gloom stared.

"Whar yo' get dat breakfus', Mistah Tommy?"

"You gave it to me, of course."

"An' whar de oder young ge'men git deirs?"

"You helped them, didn't you? How do we generally get our feed? Can I have some coffee?"

"Am yo' shuah dat am hash yo'm eatin'?" asked Jim, still in a maze.

"Certainly, and very good hash, too. You got it brown, this morning, for once."

"Don' undahstan' it 'tall!" muttered the puzzled coon, as he took Tommy's cup and left the room.

It was easy enough to understand, though.

When Jim had gone out the second time, the boys had put the clean plates out of sight, put the others on the table and had gone to eating.

Then Strapper came in, found them hard at work, and rang the bell for Gloom.

"Don' undahstan' it nohow!" he muttered, as he got the tutor's meal ready. "Fus' I help all dem boys, den I comes back an' fin' on'y clean plates, den I come agin an' dere dey is, all eatin' away ike good fellahs. Don' undahstan' it 'tall, I tol' yo'."

It was a great relief to him to know that he would not be obliged to cook a second breakfast, but that did not explain the mystery after all.

He whisked off his cap and apron, put on his swallow-tailed and white waist-coat, and, thus arrayed, waited on Strapper, and supplied the boys' remaining wants.

"Jus' like ter know whar dey git dat hash," he mused. "I take my oaf dey didn't hab none wher I come in befo'."

When they had finished their breakfast the boys went out and repaired to the school-room for study before the regular session.

It was not until he was setting the table for dinner that Jim Gloom missed his large plates, and found them under the table in the dining-room.

The mystery was as big as ever to him, for he could not put two things together to save his neck.

"Dat am de funnies' place to put plates I eber did see," he muttered as he gathered them in.

"Reckon de ole woman mus' put 'em dere yes'day after dinner. H'm! some folks am too shif'less to lib. Ef I do dat I neber heah de las' ob it."

And yet he did not tumble.

CHAPTER IV.

THINGS went on all serene at the school of Mr. Swish, and Tommy's last little racket had hardly been forgotten when he was ready with another.

The boys were supposed not to leave the house or grounds after nine at night, but when anything was up they got there just the same.

Occasionally those jolly boys desired to have a little feast after the house was quiet, and as there was no chance of getting anything out of the Swish larder they were forced to procure their eatables outside.

The boys deputed to obtain the provender were let down by means of a rope, and afterward, at a given signal, were hauled up again by their comrades.

There had been several of these little nocturnal excursions, and the boys, elated with their success in not being caught, were getting reckless.

One night Dick suggested that they have a feast, although they had had one only the night before.

He at once set up a regular uproar in that upper story voice of his.

"Thieves, burglars, fire!" he piped up, rushing toward the house.

Tommy gave the rope a terrible yank, as a signal to be hauled up.

Bob and Dick had heard the racket, and they hauled away on the rope like a good fellow.

Strapper lost sight of the window for a few moments, a tree cutting off his vision as he ran.

When he reached a point directly under the window where he had seen the dark object nothing was to be seen.

Tommy had been drawn in, and all was quiet. "Guess we won't go out to-night," said our hero.

"No, sir," said Strapper, humbly, as he sneaked away.

Little Tommy Bounce had crept to the head of the stairs, and had heard this little conversation.

"It's all hunky, boys," he said, when he returned. "Swish won't believe a word he says."

"Then we're all right?"

"Yes, and I've got an idea."

"For to-night?"

"Not to-night; s'm'other night. Over the river!" and Tommy rolled into bed, and would say no more.

The next day, however, he told his chief cronie all about it.



Mrs. Swish overturned a cup of hot coffee in her lap, Swish fell over backward out of his chair and nearly kicked over the table, while all the boys just shrieked and howled.

"Don't you think we are getting too hilarious," said Bob.

"Not at all," added Joe. "Nobody ever tumbles, and we might as well have all the fun we can."

"Old Swish will tumble some day," remarked little Tommy Bounce. "We'll get so fat, and he'll know that it isn't from what we get here."

"You aren't afraid, are you, Tom?" asked Bob.

"Not at all, my boy, but really I don't feel hungry."

"Well, then, suppose we go off for a stroll, then, and take in Deacon Whitehead's melon patch on the way."

"I'm agreeable."

It happened that on this very evening Mr. Strapper had been to town to make a stump speech in favor of old Swish, who was running for the office of selectman of the town.

He was returning by the light of the moon, which was not at all favorable to the boys' expedition, when he saw a dark object being lowered from one of the upper windows.

The dark object was Tommy Bounce, who was the first to descend.

Strapper never was a fellow to keep his mouth shut when he made a discovery.

"No, indeed," answered Bob. "That parrot down there will arouse the house."

Strapper continued to yell out an alarm, and soon everybody in the house was awake.

Jim Gloom stuck his head out of an attic window, and shouted:

"G'way dar, yo' fellah, else I sot de dogs on yo'."

Mrs. Swish stuck out her head, ornamented with a big night cap, and said, sharply:

"Come in at once, you fool! What do you mean by coming home intoxicated?"

"I ain't," replied the shrill voice of the under master. "I saw robbers getting into the house."

"Robbah yo'ownse'f," cried Gloom, from above.

"Dey ain' nuffin' wuff stealin' in dis yer house."

"Come in at once and stop your noise," said Lady Swish.

"Yes'm," squeaked Strapper, in humble tones.

When he came in Swish gave him a laying out, notwithstanding the fact that the poor man had made himself hoarse in his master's praise.

"I'm sure I thought I saw robbers coming down the side of the house," he protested, mildly.

"Nonsense, it was the shadow of a tree. Go to bed, and the next time don't drink too much hard cider."

"That's another good one on Jim Gloom," observed Bob.

"So it is, but keep it dark."

"As dark as Jim Gloom himself."

Swish made no allusion to the affair of the night before, as he thought Strapper must have been imbibing.

The shrill-voiced tutor knew that he had not been, but as no one would believe him he concluded to keep still.

That afternoon, however, Bob Smiley went to Jim Gloom, who was washing wagons out behind the barn, and said, very mysteriously:

"Say, Mr. Gloom, you're the only man on this place that's got any sense. Will you keep it quiet if I tell you something?"

"Don' yo' fool wif me, boy," muttered the big coon.

"Oh, I ain't. I've got something real important to tell you. Don't give me away, will you?"

"Reckon I couldn' sell yo', boy, an' I guess I hab to give yo' way, dough I don' know who take yo'."

"No, I mean that you won't tell anybody I told you."

"Specs I won' if you was'e so much time. Wha' yo' gotter tell me, boy?"

"You won't tell on me? You're the only man with any gumption on the whole place, and I wouldn't tell any one else."

"Well, well, boy, what am I?" cried Jim, getting impatient. "I kean't wait heah all day long."

"You won't tell that I told you?"

"Cose not."

"Well, then, some of the boys are going to let themselves out of a window to-night, and go off to the store and get a lot of things to eat."

"Dey is, is dey?" snorted Gloom. "Not ef I knows it. I got hull charge ob dis yer 'stablishment', an' I 'low no boys out ob de house aftah ten o'clock, no, sah."

"Well, they're going all the same."

"H'm! Not ef I kin stop it. Dat was wha' de noise was 'bout las' night, I reckon. Dat time dey cotch me asleep, but dis time dey don' do it, I tol' yo'."

"You'll have to watch 'em pretty close, Mr. Gloom."

"I reckon I'se able ter, son," said the huge darky, swelling with importance.

"And you won't say that I told you?"

"No, sah, but I'd 'wise yo' not to be one ob de boys wha's gwine out de winder."

"Oh, no, of course not."

"An' I don' wanter know who is a gwine, but jes' lemme cotch em, dat's all."

"Well, I hope you will," said Bob, as he went off.

Jim Gloom did not detect the tone of satire which lingered in the boy's words, and after Bob had departed he thought to himself.

"H'm! Guess I hain' got charge ob dis place for nuffin'. Like ter see dem boys get away when I says dey shan'."

It was not very long after this that Strapper and his squeaky voice came around where Gloom was working and said:

"Jim, you were very disrespectful to me last night."

"Dat so, sah?" asked Gloom, evidently very much astonished.

"Yes; you ordered me into the house very peremptorily."

"My wo'd! was it as bad as dat, sah? Deah sakes! I neber fo'gib myse'f. De fac' ob de mat-tah was, sah, dat I took yo' fo' one ob de boys."

"But the boys are never out so late."

"Yes, dey is, sah."

"They are not allowed, I tell you."

"Don' make no difference wheder dey's 'lowed or not, dey gets dere all de same."

"Why—why, this must be stopped!" squealed the little man.

"Dat's jes' wha' I t'ink, sah, an' I'se been tryin' to make up my min' to tell de boss 'bout wha's been gwine on, but den I said to m'se'f dat he orter fin' it out hese'f."

"What has been going on, Jim?" asked Strapper with a higher squeak than usual, his excitement being most intense.

"Why, dem boys has got to goin' out ebery night."

The big darky did not know this, but he thought it would be clever to say it.

"You don't say!"

"Yas'r, an' dey's gwine out to-night agin' sah."

"Keep it dark, Mr. Gloom, keep it dark," said Strapper, putting loads of mystery into his squeal.

"Say nothing, but be sure to be at the corner of the right wing of the school building to-night at ten."

"Yas'r, I be dere, sure."

Then Strapper went off and and found Mr. Swish, to whom he communicated the information he had just learned, claiming, however, the whole credit of having discovered the plot.

This was done in order to square himself with Swish and be recalled to favor.

"Very good," said Swish. "It seems that you weren't too drunk to see straight after all. Say nothing. We will catch these miscreants in the act. I will overlook your intoxication, in consideration of your giving me this information."

Strapper did not seem to feel as if he had gained so very much after all.

Old Swish knew well enough that his assistant had not been tight the previous evening, but he was too mean to reward the fellow for his vigilance and got out of it in this way.

If somebody had saved Swish's life he would have rewarded them by offering to shake with them for the drinks, or possibly by giving them a handful of tracts.

In fact he was as mean as stink-weed and without possessing its one virtue.

Well, the boys' little plot was known, as Swish supposed, and the boys themselves were going to receive a surprise party.

If Swish and the rest had known as much as the reader, they would not have felt so hilarious, however.

Tommy Bounce, Bob Smiley, Dick Tucker, and the rest of the fellows in the dormitory, were ready for the professor and his gang, though they all looked as innocent as mice.

After they had gone up-stairs and the lights were out, they went to the window that they generally used in getting out at night.

From this they carefully lowered a rope, on the end of which was a dummy, made of old clothes and stuffed with straw and papers.

The rope was fastened securely about the dummy's middle and it would take a pretty good tug to detach it therefrom.

When the dummy had reached the ground, Tommy let a pebble fall down the side of the house with a clatter.

The watchers around the corner heard the racket, and thought sure that it was a boy's heels hitting against the side of the house.

Then there was a rush all at once, Gloom, Strapper and Swish making a simultaneous break.

"Hi, dere, stop o' dat!" yelled Jim.

That was the signal for Tommy.

He and Bob gave the rope a yank, and the dummy went up three feet.

"Hol' on, dere, hol' on. I got yo'," cried Jim Gloom.

He grabbed the dummy by the middle, and tried to haul him down.

Then a couple more boys went to the assistance of Tommy and Bob.

Under their combined efforts, that big moke was lifted from the ground.

"Hi-hi-hi, come help me, b' s," he yelled. "I'se got one ob de fellahs, sho'."

Up he went, however, three or four feet, his fat legs dangling in the air.

Swish ran in and grabbed one while Strapper seized the other.

"Hold on, Jim, hold on!"

"Don't you let him go, hold on!"

More boys laid hold of the rope, and now there were three dangling forms instead of one.

Jim Gloom didn't like that sort of business.

His hands, big as they were, were not strong enough to hold up all that weight.

More than that, the dummy began to come apart. That scared him so that he let go his hold.

At the same moment Tommy and the boys slackened up on the rope.

Down went Swish and Strapper with Jim Gloom on top of them.

It was all right for Gloom, but the others did not like it so well.

Mr. Lick had just run up to assist the others.

He was just in time to be knocked flat.

If the fall had been a higher one poor Swish would have had the breath knocked out of him.

As it was he felt as if an elephant had been waltzing on his abdomen.

All four went down in a heap, Gloom on top, and then the rope went up and the window came down.

"Ugh! get off!"

"Oh, oh! you're killing me!"

"Get off, you clumsy brute!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! get up!"

"Fo' goodness sake, I belebe dat fellah am pulled in two."

Finally that struggling mass of humanity resolved itself into its component parts, and four very much demoralized men stood up in the moonlight against the house.

"Am yo' hurted, boss?" asked Gloom.

"Of course I am. Why couldn't you keep hold of the fellow when you had him, you clown?"

"I'se got his legs anyhow, boss."

The three teachers came up and surveyed the remains.

"Stuffed!" grunted Lick, in underground tones.

"It's a dummy!" squawked Strapper.

"H'm, yes, fooled," snorted Swish. "Pretty lot of idiots you are."

If that gang wasn't mad we wouldn't say so.

"I'll find out the perpetrators of this outrage if I have to thrash every boy in the school," sputtered Swish.

"Strapper has been fooling us again," said Lick, who hated his colleague, and would like to have had him fired out.

"You're all fools!" snorted Swish. "Go to bed, the lot of you."

They went.

The next day Swish tried to find out who owned the clothes the dummy had worn.

He could not ascertain, however, and then he asked the boys to tell what they knew of the affair.

Of course they told—in a horn.

He started in by licking a dozen of the most unpopular boys of the school, and then stopped from being too tired to go on.

"The next practical joke that happens, I will thrash the rest of you," he remarked. "There has been altogether too much of this sort of business going on."

Of the fellows who got lickings, not one knew of or had any hand in the affair of the dummy.

They needed thrashing, on general principles, however, and poetic justice was therefore appeased, and everything was lovely.

Not the least breath of suspicion fell upon little Tommy Bounce and his cronies.

They were such nice, quiet, orderly, studious, well-behaved boys that of course they could not have had anything to do with the matter.

Then their fathers paid their bills promptly, and of course the boys were all right.

Once let a pupil's bill get in arrears, and the way that chap got whaled was a warning to delinquents.

Jim Gloom said nothing about his little interview with Bob, but possibly in his constant round of duties he forgot all about it.

Perhaps also a present of a pair of woolen mittens and a coonskin cap had something to do with his forgetfulness, though as to that we are not certain.

Well, things went on nicely for several days, and no more jokes were played on Jim or the masters.

One morning, after breakfast and before school, Tommy Bounce went nosing around the barn, and caught on to a brood of chickens that had just broken out of their shell houses, and were beginning a tour of the world under the supervision of the proud old Biddy, their mother, who had had the rare good fortune to fetch a dozen chicks out of as many eggs without one going back on her.

The way that old hen strutted and clucked and plumed herself was a lesson to mothers who think that one child is one too many.

The chicks were fluffy little fellows, yellow and brown and black, as puffy as balls of cotton and as active as quicksilver itself.

Count 'em! You couldn't do it for the life of you, they moved so fast.

It was fun to watch the fat little fellows running about, and Tommy thought, like many more, that there was nothing quite as comical as a newly hatched chicken, all fuss and feathers.

"I must get hold of that brood," he remarked.

"I think I have a use for them."

Then he scurried around, got a basket and some soft hay, bribed the old hen with a lot of meal made into a paste, and finally succeeded in bagging or rather basketing every one of those chicks.

Then he clapped on the lid and put his prisoners where they would be warm and cozy, leaving poor Biddy to mourn her loss all the morning.

Just before dinner time Tommy stole out, giving Bob the wink to follow in a few minutes.

"Sneak into the pantry when the old woman and Jim aren't looking," said Tommy, "and collar a soup tureen or a big covered dish of some kind and put it in the middle of the table."

"All right, my boy, I'll do it," said Bob, and he kept his word.

When the bell rang for dinner the boys rushed up-stairs, combed and brushed and dusted themselves, and then filed into the dining-room looking as sober as so many judges.

Only a few were in the snap, but they did not give themselves away.

Mrs. Swish presided, looking very red in the face, for she had been stewing a lot of tough old hens and superannuated roosters for the boys' dinner, and standing over the steaming pot had not improved her complexion.

The boys all took seats, Swish said a short grace, for he was a pious old duck, and then Lady Swish began to pour the coffee.

"What is in the large dish, my dear?" whispered Swish. "Soup?"

"Soup! No, indeed! We don't have soup on Thursdays."

Then she tapped the bell for Jim Gloom to appear.

Swish was quite anxious to know what was in that big dish.

"Master Bounce, will you be so kind as to uncover the dish in front of you," he asked.

Oh, he could be awfully polite when he wished.

Besides, the dish was nearer to Tommy than it was to him, and he could not uncover it while his wife's watchful eyes were upon him.

"Certainly," said Tommy, with a smile.

Off came the cover of the big dish.

At that very instant Jim Gloom came in with a big platter of stewed chicken in both hands.

He was about to set down the cooked chicken, when the uncooked ones made their appearance.

As soon as that dish-cover came off, out popped a dozen little chicks, peeping and chipping and jumping all over the table.

That was too much for Jim Gloom.

He thought that the age of miracles had returned and that the old hens on the platter had suddenly turned to little chickens.

He gave one snort, dropped plate and all on

the floor and jumped back four feet, his eyes fairly starting out of his head.

Smash!

The platter went all to pieces, and drumsticks, wings, second joints, necks, breasts, and gizzards went flying over the floor.

"Fo' massy sakes, look o' dem chickens!" he gasped.

The crash made every one jump, and the fluffy little chicks went scurrying over the table like mad.

Mrs. Swish overturned a cup of hot coffee in her lap, Swish fell over backward out of his chair and nearly kicked over the table, while all the boys just shrieked and howled.

Then the mother of the chicks, alarmed by their cries, had flown right through the window and alighted on the head of Mrs. Swish.

Swish and wife both rolled to the floor; Jim Gloom dusted and all the boys howled.

No wonder that it seemed as if pandemonium had been unchained and turned loose on the school.

"Peep, peep, peep!" said the chicks.

"Cut, cut, cut! What a racket!" answered the old hen.

"Take her off!" yelled Mrs. Swish.

"Ho, ho, ho! What fun!" screamed the boys.

"There seems to be quite a commotion," ob-

They looked like it.

"Guess I can get up alone," continued Swish, rubbing his bald spot.

The assistants vowed that they would let him do it.

They weren't going to set up their heads as billiard balls for anybody.

Meantime Biddy had gathered her chicks about her and was beginning to dine off the stewed chicken on the floor.

The cannibal!

Gloom returned at this moment and put a stop to that sort of thing.

He knew that the capsized stew would be served



Black Tom was squirming and squalling and looking for something on which to put his feet. He got it.

The chicks "peeped" and "peeped" and called for their mamma for all they knew how.

Right in the midst of all the clatter a big, fat, red hen came flying in at the window, of which she busted two panes, and lighted right on the head of Lady Swish.

It was the mother of those kidnapped chicks.

Then there was a fuss for a fact.

Madame Swish rolled over to the floor in a dead faint, Gloom went flying out of the room as though Satan were after him, and the boys laughed till they cried.

And all this over a dish of chickens!

CHAPTER V.

Who ever heard of a dish of chickens frightening the wits out of a whole roomful of people?

What is there so terrible in a dish of chickens that one must go out of his head upon witnessing it?

The trouble was just this:

Little Tommy Bounce had let loose a brood of newly hatched chicks upon the dining-room table while all hands were seated thereat.

First Gloom had been alarmed, and had let a platter full of chicken fricassee fall to the floor with a crash.

served Tommy, very soberly, and without the ghost of a smile.

"Oh, I've broken my neck!" howled Swish.

"Pick me up, somebody."

Strapper and Lick ran to perform this office, each striving to be first.

Both stooped at the same time to pick up Swish.

Thump!

Their two heads came together with a whack.

Didn't they see stars?

Well, just a few.

They jumped back and glared at each other

while they rubbed their pates.

"Don't do that again!" squealed Strapper.

"You did it yourself!" thundered Lick.

Then Swish concluded to get up without any help.

At the same time the two assistants rushed up

again.

Whack!

This time it was a triple shot.

Three heads bumped together instead of two.

There wasn't any nonsense about it, either.

Strapper and Lick suddenly sat down, one on

either side of Swish.

The latter sat facing both the others and was mad

enough.

"You're a couple of fools!" he snifled.

up for his dinner, and he didn't want any chickens or old hens picking at it.

"Shoo! get out o' dat!" he cried, brandishing his arms and making a great splurge.

Of course it accomplished nothing.

No man can chase a hen away properly, anyhow.

They usually cause the fowl to go into hysterics, fly through a plate-glass window, knock down a hundred-dollar vase, or smash all the crockery, and after that they have to call in some woman to help them.

A woman is a natural born hen exterminator every time.

Mrs. Swish proved herself one on this occasion.

All she did was to gather up her skirts, flit her apron, and say "Shoo!" in a gentle, persuasive tone of voice, and out went Biddy and her chicks as quietly as could be.

"Jim Gloom, if you play any more tricks in this house you'll be discharged!" she snapped.

Gloom was cleaning up the mess on the floor when this word went forth.

He stopped, very much astonished, looked at the lady and said:

"Guess I done got 'nuff to do in dis ho'se, miss, wifout spendin' any o' my time foolin'. Ef

yo' wan' me to do dat yo'll hab ter get anoder man to help wif de wo'k."

"It's very funny," muttered Mrs. Swish. "We did not use to have such uproars."

"H'm, yes, very singular!" remarked Swish, glancing about him.

"Sammy Swipes, you are laughing," he cried, spotting one of the boys. "Come into my study after school, and I'll attend to you. It was you, was it?"

Sammy protested his innocence, but that made no odds.

He was in for a thrashing, and he might just as well saved his breath to cool his chicken.

Billy Boggs was also caught giggling, and an interview was appointed for him as well as for Sammy.

It is not necessary to observe that neither Sammy nor Billy knew the first thing about the chicks except what they had seen.

Well, quiet was at last restored. Gloom brought in a fresh supply of grub, and the meal proceeded in silence.

"Jes' like to know who brought dat hen's nes' inter de ho'se," muttered Jim Gloom. "Las' time I seed um it was in de bahn. Nice place to hatch out a brood o' chickens, on de dinin'-room table! Clar' fo' it, folks is gettin' mo' shifless roun' dis place ev'ry day."

"Ole mist'ess flink I put dem chickens on de table, hey? H'm! reckon ef I had I wouldn't been so skeered when dey jump out. Guess I c'd tol' her who done it ef I'd a min'ter."

Added to his manifold duties of gardener, watchman, porter, cook *et cetera* Jim was just about now expected to go to town after Swish's mail, which was becoming quite extensive.

To this Jim made strenuous objections.

"Look yer, boss," he said one evening, "I don't min' gwine to de willage aftah de lettahs, but ef I do dat I'se gwine to gib up some ob de oder wo'k, shuah."

"Why, the other work don't take much of your time, Jim."

"Don't it? Well, I reckon it do, boss. Did yo' eber count up wha' I gotter do, boss?"

"H'm! yes, I can form an idea, Gloom, but it isn't much."

"Amn't it, boss? Fus' I gits up an' makes de flahs, den I gits de breadfus', den I milks—no, I milks fus', den I look arter de critters, den miebbe I bakes or sweeps or washes up de dishes, or, p'raps, does all ob dem, an' aftah dat I has de din-nah to git, and go to de willage an' putter in de gahden an' run arands fo' ole mist'ess an' cl'ar up de school-room an' keep de boys out o' mischief, an' den git suppah, an' de Lawd on'y knows wha' I don't hab to do."

"H'm! yes. Maybe you are a trifle overworked, Jim; but then, you are so reliable, you know. There isn't anybody that can do the work the way you can."

Taffy on the part of Swish.

Jim wasn't biting, however.

"Wouldn't car' tall, boss, 'bout de res' ob de wo'k," he remarked, "ef 'twarn't for de cookin'."

"The boys all admire your cooking exceedingly, Jim."

"Kean't help dat, sah. De wo'k am too hahd. Jes' imagine a big fellah like me standin' ober a hot stove till de fat jes' fries out o' me, an' den habin' to run out in de col' ter git up der hoss! It am 'nuff to brung me to my deff, boss."

"Couldn't you manage to cook if you didn't have to go to town, Jim?" asked Swish, who saw a difficulty.

"No, sah, I couldn't? Don' wanter cook anyhow, boss."

"Somebody must do it."

"Dere's de ole mist'ess, boss, she kin cook as good as me."

"My wife?" said Swish, astonished.

"Yas'r. She kin do it."

"My wife is not a cook, Mr. Gloom, even if she does understand it; she is a lady, I'll have you know."

"Specs she am, boss, but ef I has to cook, I frew up de job an' go somewhars else."

"You are not dissatisfied, Gloom?"

Swish was getting alarmed.

He knew that he got ten times as much work out of that coon as he was paid for, and hated to lose him.

"No, sah, I'se sa'sfied 'nuff, perwided I doesn' hab to do any mo' cookin'."

"H'm, yes, let me see, h'm," muttered Swish. "I suppose it would be better to get some one else, but then, good cooks are hard to find."

That wasn't what he was thinking of, though.

It was the extra expense.

That was what galled him.

A cook would cost anywhere from fifteen to twenty piastres a month, besides their board.

If he could save that much he could chuckle over it.

However, he could not afford to lose Jim Gloom.

"You don't happen to know of a good cook, do you, Jim?" he asked.

"Yas'r, I know lots ob dem down in de willage, good ones, too, boss."

"Colored?"

"Ob co'se, boss. Col'd cooks am de bes' ev'ry time. Yo' wouldn't wan' a I'sh cook, I hope, to was'e an' steal an' spoil tings."

"No, no, of course not; get a colored one, by all means."

"How much yo' pay, boss?"

"H'm, yes, well, that is, well, you can tell her that I guess we can arrange terms, Jim. Send her up as soon as you can."

"Get her to-morrer, boss; would ter-night if it wasn't so late, but I fotch her ter-morrer, fo' shuah."

He was as good as his word, and the new cook appeared the next day.

She was very nearly as big as Jim Gloom himself, and fully as black, her face shining like a full moon done in ebony, while the earth trembled when she walked.

The dusky hash factor was a widow, passably good-looking for a coon, as good natured as the day was long, and was called M'riar by friends and acquaintances alike.

M'riar was engaged forthwith, and at ridiculously low wages, the good creature being too simple minded to prevent old Swish from swindling her.

Jim Gloom had as much to do after M'riar came as before and never got it done either, just as before, but that may have been the cook's fault.

Whenever he got a chance Jim would run around to the kitchen and chin the cook, upon whom he had got the biggest kind of a mash.

It did not matter how busy he was, he managed every now and then to take time to go and spoon.

The cows might wait, the horses might stand, the sweeping could be put off, the mail would not run away, the grass could go uncut, but he must neglect no opportunity to see and talk to M'riar.

The cook did not mind this sort of thing, but went on with her work all the same.

She was used to taffy, and rather liked it than otherwise.

That big coon was capable of giving her all she wanted and still having enough left.

"Dat young woman am jes' my huckleberry," he would often remark. "Golly! If I didn't hab to wo'k so hahd, I blebe I'd be in dat yer kitchen all day long."

It was quite likely that he would.

As mashing takes time, in order to do it justice, Jim's work still remained in the state of incompleteness usual to it, and he never quite finished anything, although he always had time to say something soft to M'riar.

It did not take Tommy Bounce and his chums long to get on to Jim Gloom's little mashing racket, and they resolved to have some fun out of it.

"That coon spends every spare moment of his time in or around the kitchen," said Bob.

"Yes, he's got it bad," answered Tommy, solemnly.

"We want to give him an agreeable surprise," suggested Dick.

"We will, my son, don't you worry."

"What'll it be?" queried Joe.

"Leave that to me, my boy."

That was quite sufficient.

If little Tommy Bounce had charge of the affair it was sure to be a dazzling success.

Jim Gloom's habits were noted carefully by the young joker, and a plan of operations was soon put in motion.

It was Saturday afternoon; the air was mild and balmy, and the boys were supposed to be off in the woods enjoying the lovely Indian summer weather.

They were enjoying it fast enough, but they were not in the woods by a large majority.

Jim Gloom was puttering about the place as usual, and whenever he appeared near the house the boys dusted.

M'riar was baking pies in the kitchen, and was up to her eyes in work and flour.

She could spare a few moments now and then however.

Strange to relate, those moments came in always at the time when Jim Gloom sauntered up to the open window and looked in.

The upper half of the window was down and Jim could lean upon the sash very conveniently and converse with the dusky Venus within.

After one or two of these little visits which usually lasted from five to ten minutes, little Tommy Bounce got his snap right up to the boiling point.

On the second floor above there was a hall, and one of the windows was directly over that at which Jim was doing his spooning.

"Come on, boys," said Tommy, "I've got the

thing down fine. Get a rope, somebody, and somebody else catch the old Tom cat."

The latter was a big bruiser of a feline, nearly as big as a dog, with claws on him like knives, and a grip of iron.

He was black and shiny, and felt very proud of himself, and as the boys now and then petted him he felt that he just took the bun for beauty.

Bob Smiley got the same rope that had been used to lower the dummy which had taken in all hands, while Dick ran off and fetched black Tom.

"Purr-rr-rr!" remarked that self-satisfied animal, as he cuddled in Dick's arms and rubbed his head against the boy's shoulder.

If he had known what was going to be done with him he would not have been so contented, you can just bet.

But he didn't, so that was all right.

"Nice Tom, clever Tom, bully old cat!" said the wily Dick, stroking his majesty Grimalkin.

"Purr-rr!" observed Thomas, pleased at the notice paid him, but caring nothing for the boy.

A cat is something like a woman; praise her up and she feels immense, but it is the praise and not you that she cares for.

Well, Dick carried the cat to the hall, and then Tommy produced a broad canvas belt, which he proceeded to fasten around that cat's middle.

This was then secured to the rope, and the whole business let down toward the kitchen window.

Jim Gloom was there, but all that an outsider could see was his legs.

He was leaning on the sash, and uttering soft nothings to M'riar.

He had on a short woolen jacket which barely reached to his suspender buttons, so that the broad and expansive bosom of his striped trousers showed out in all its glory.

This and his legs was all that was visible of Mr. Jim Gloom.

The rest of him was in the window talking to M'riar.

"Bakin' pies am yo', h'm?" asked Jim Gloom.

"M-m! Dem boys am de wussest pie-eatahs. I eber see."

"Reckon dey all come f'om Bosting, don' yo' reckon?"

"M-m, leastwise dey is fon' ob pies, an' dey likes 'em sweet, too."

"Lots o' lasses."

"M-m, an' sugar an' all dat."

"Dem pies mus' be sweet, M'riar, but dey isn't half so sweet as yo' is, I tol' yo'."

"H'm, g'long wif yo', Mistah Gloom, yo's a deceivah."

"Don' call me Mistah Gloom, M'riar. Yo's knowed me long 'nuff to be more social."

"H'm, he-he, wha' shell I call yo', den? Shell I call yo' Mistah Jim?"

"Couldn't yo' leabe de mistah off ef yo' tried very hahd?"

"M-m, p'raps I mought, but yo' is a deceibah all de same."

"No, I isn't. No wondah yo' likes to make pies an' puddin's an' dem like, yo' is so sweet yo'se'f."

"G'long dere, yo' make me put salt fo' sugar in de pie."

"Den yo' des' look at it agin an' it got des' as sweet as yo' want 'um."

"Oh, Mistah Jim!"

"Oh, M'riar, yo' am jes' my size! Wha' yo' say to bein'—"

Whatever proposition Jim Gloom was about to make was suddenly and very rudely cut short.

While he had been leaning on that sash giving M'riar taffy, the boys had been busy at work.

Tommy Bounce had taken his bearings, and was now lowering that big black cat right over the spot where Jim's broad, stern appeared on the landscape.

Thomas did not like that sort of business.

He was clawing about in the wildest fashion, trying to get a hold on the clapboards.

Tommy held him out too far for that, however.

You can bet that cat would never trust Tommy Bounce and his cronies again.

There was Jim Gloom, and there was the cat drawing together like the needle and the magnet.

Jim must have been the magnet in this case.

The big coon was right on the point of saying something sweet, when it was knocked silly in a jiffy.

Black Tom was squirming and squalling and looking for something on which to put his feet.

He got it.

Tommy suddenly let him drop, kerslap, right onto the rear extension of Jim Gloom's striped trousers.

Oh, what a surprise!

CHAPTER VI.

JIM GLOOM and a tom-cat.

The big coon looking in at the kitchen window mashing the cook, and only his expansive rear view in sight.

The tom-cat coming down from an upper window on the end of a rope straight for Jim.

Then there is a sudden fall.

Tom-cat drops on Jim's rear and digs in his long claws.

Surprise!

Jim was in the middle of a fine speech and was just coming to business when the feline cyclone struck him.

As soon as the animal landed Little Tommy Bounce began to haul up on the rope.

The cat made the greatest possible objections.

He had struck bottom and was bound to stay there.

No more aerial flights for him.

His slide did not end on the table, however.

He went clean across it and struck the floor with a thump.

M'riar yelled and fell back upon a chair, which, unprepared for any such sudden assault, was all broke up.

Down went cook, chair, and the whole business.

The black cat in the meantime went suddenly flying back again through the window.

The rope had been drawn taut, and Tommy had taken a reef in the slack at the same time.

Jim Gloom's fall had loosened the cat's grip, and the pulling on the rope had finished the job.

"Clar out ob dis ketchen, yo' clumsy niggah!" she sputtered. "Am dat de way to entah a lady's 'pahtmen's?"

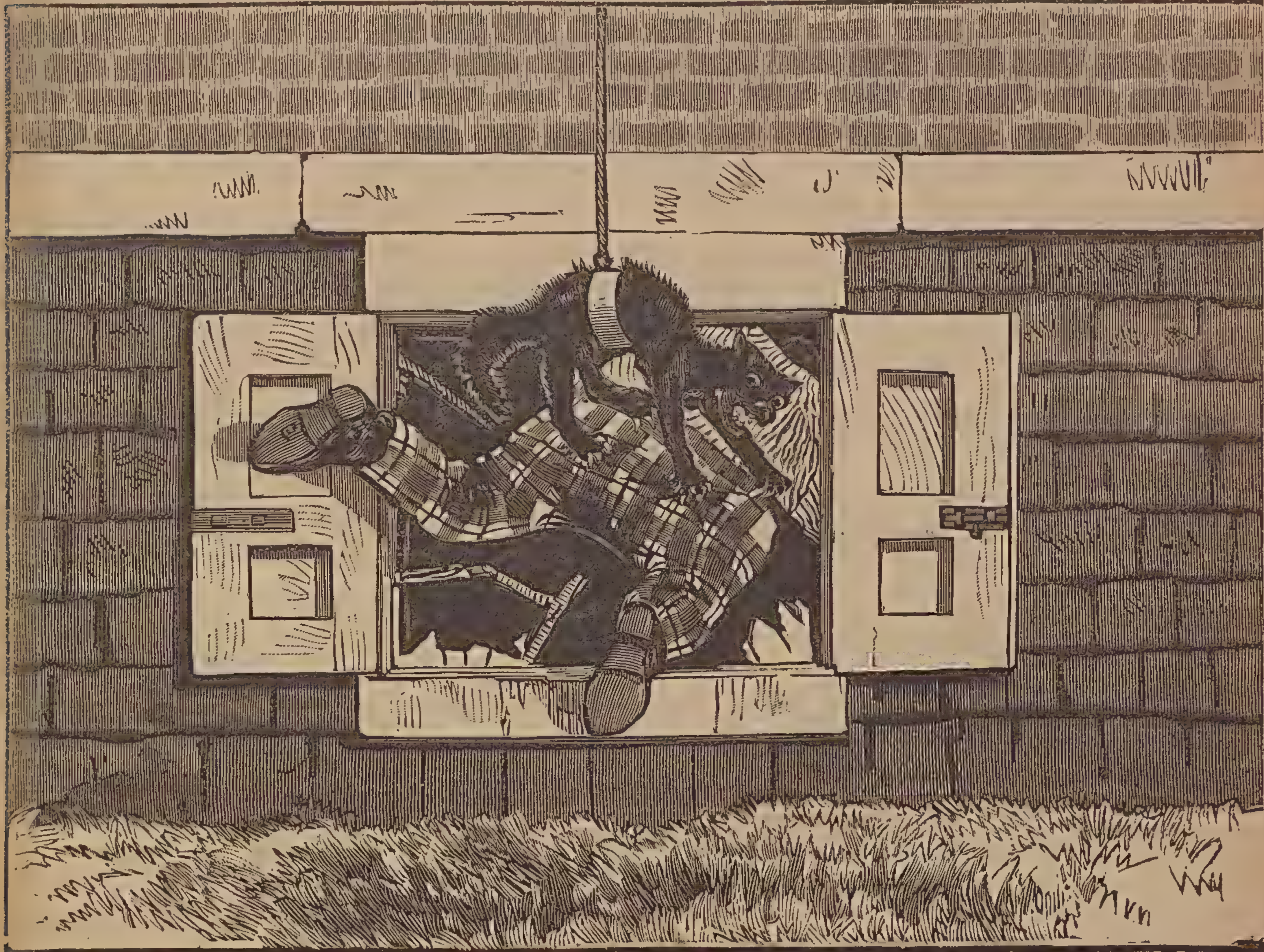
"Blame de muel, M'riar. It warn't my fault." "Dey wasn' no muel 'tall, it's jes' yo' clumsy way ob doin' tings."

"Ef I wasn' kicked froo dat windah by one ob dem muels, den I don' know what."

"Whar am de mule now?" asked M'riar, scornfully.

"Out on de green, I s'pees."

"Den yo' kin go out dere an' fin' him, an' go froo de do', too. Ain' goin' to hab yo' makin' so free comin' in by de windahs when de do' is jes' as



There was a vision of flying legs, striped trousers, big feet and black cat, and then nothing but an open window. !

He was quite satisfied to remain where he was. The instant he felt the rope draw, he dug his claws deep into Jim Gloom's trousers and held on. He went beyond the trousers in fact and struck right where Jim lived.

All this took but a second or two of time.

The instant that those sharp feline claws penetrated Jim Gloom's meat he gave a yell and bolted.

He thought that the adversary had him for certain.

The one impulse, thought, idea and inclination was to get away.

He got.

Straight through the window.

There was a vision of flying legs, striped trousers, big feet and black cat, and then nothing but an open window.

M'riar, the genius of the kitchen, had been listening spellbound at the eloquent taffy given her by Jim Gloom.

She had never heard such saccharine language before and was eager for more.

She got more than she bargained for.

Jim Gloom gave a sudden and most unearthly yell and shot through the window, landing upon the table beneath.

He slid across this like a ball-player going for second, regardless of the things on it.

The way that cat went through that window was an example to comets.

In three shakes he was being let in at the upper window, the maddest feline ever seen.

In four shakes Jim Gloom had arisen to his feet.

Brushing the flour and sand and bread crumbs off of his clothes he looked around to see what had struck him.

"Whar dat ole muel wha' kick me? Who let um out, anyhow?"

He was dead sure that nothing less than the hind hoof of an able-bodied mule could have sent him through that window with such celerity.

"I allus tol' de boss dat dem muels couldn't be kep' in de stable, but he specs I'se gwine ter tone 'em loose an' look arter dem, 'sides doin' all my oder wo'k. It's time fo' me ter strike fo' mo' wages an' less wo'k, dat's what it am."

Just then M'riar picked herself up from the wreck.

She was mad all the way through.

She did not get that way often, but when she did she stayed there.

She thought that Jim had come in through the window on purpose, and she did not like it.

He had upset her pan of flour, ruined two apple pies, made her break a chair and had upset her tranquillity generally.

handy. Ain' goin' ter hab yo' comin' in yer no-how."

"Now, don' yo' get 'cited, M'riar. I'se got as much call to come inter dis yer kitchen as yo' hab."

"No, yo' habn't!" and M'riar grabbed up a broom.

She would take a joke, but she wouldn't stand sass.

Jim wanted to argue the point.

M'riar's arguments were too convincing for him, however.

She gave them to him at the end of a broom, across the seat of his pants.

Two of her cracks sufficed.

He went out of that kitchen flying.

"Gorry! Wen' out as fas' as I wen' in!" he remarked. "Wondah wha' ails de cook to-day?"

He could not solve this mystery, and so he began to look for the mule.

There was none to be seen, nor any other animal, biped or quadruped.

He went to the stable and found all the stock in their places, not a creature being absent.

He scratched his head, rubbed the rear of his trousers and mused.

"Dat am de strangest t'ing dat happen yit. It's bery curi's, but eber sence dat little Tommy Bounce

come to de place t'ings hab been goin' diffe'nt f'om wha' dey used to, an' I keant understan' it 't all."

In fact, it was patent to all that things were livelier in the Swish establishment than they had been in a long time.

Not a day passed without something happening. That night when Jim Gloom went up-stairs to see that all the lights were out he ran into a pail of water placed on a step in the middle of a long flight of stairs.

The water was upset, the pail went clattering down-stairs, and Jim Gloom got a terrible fright and was nearly thrown down.

The next day Swish put on his silk dicer which stood on a table in the front hall, and when he took it off—in church too, mind—a pack of cards fell out of it and scattered themselves all over the aisle, greatly scandalizing all the good deacons.

That same night Mr. Lick found a young pig in his bed, and was as much frightened as the little porker was, when he was routed out.

The next day three or four widows came out from town to answer an advertisement for a wife, which had been posted in the village, signed by Strapper, of the piping voice.

As Strapper had a wife and three kids in another part of the State, everybody was greatly horrified at his conduct.

Thus things went on, and Swish became as mad as a hornet.

Sending for Jim Gloom one afternoon he said, sternly:

"Are you getting lazy, Gloom? If not, why don't you attend to your business?"

"Wha' de mattah now, boss?"

"You are supposed to keep a watch over the boys out of school hours, are you not?"

"Yes, boss, an' I reckon I does it."

"I reckon you don't, then," retorted Swish, snappishly.

"Wha' de reason, boss?"

"Reason enough. There has been more mischief this term than for the last six."

"Know dey has, boss."

"Well, why don't you stop it?"

"Kean't catch um, boss."

"Who put those little chickens on the table?"

"Don' know, sah."

"Who set the pail of water on the stairs?"

"Couldn't tol' yo'."

"Who put the cards in my hat?"

"Didn't see him do it, sah."

"You know very well that there is mischief going on all the time?"

"Specs dey is, boss. Neber see sech times m'se'f."

"Well, can't you find out who does it?"

"I hab my 'spicions, sah."

"Oh, you have?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, who is it?"

"Reckon ef yo' ask dat little Tommy Bounce he could tol' yo' sump'n."

"Tommy Bounce?"

"Dat's de fellah wha' do it all, boss, yo' jes' take my wo'd fo' t."

"H'm, there isn't a quieter, more sober boy in the whole school. Why, he never even laughs."

"Kear't help dat, boss. Eber sence he come yer t'ings has been goin' on like dey neber did befo'."

"H'm, yes, I know [they have, but Bounce hasn't anything to do with them."

"Bet yo' he's at de bottom ob it all."

"Have you any proofs?"

"No, boss, I habn't any proofs, but I'se convicted dat he is de fellah."

"Convinced, you mean."

"Sump'n like dat, boss."

"That won't do. The culprit must be actually detected. I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Wha' dat, boss?" asked Gloom anxiously.

"I'll make you a detective."

"Wha' dat?"

"Well, it's something like a special policeman."

"H'm! I'se watchman an' potah an' flahman an' gahdnah an' coal-heavah an' drivah an' stable-boy an' butlah an' head waitah an' lots oder t'ings now, boss. Don' flink I hab room fo' anyt'ing else."

"I'll make you a special detective," continued Swish, ignoring Jim Gloom's remark, "and pay you five dollars if you find out who is at the bottom of all this mischief."

"Pay me fl' dollahs, boss, if I tol' yo' fo' sho' whd do all de foolin'?"

"Yes, five dollars."

"Dat am outside my sal'ry, boss?"

Jim had no objection to being made anything, provided he was paid for it.

"Yes, outside of your salary, but you must be positive that you get the right person."

"I make shuah ob dat, boss. I'se a detective, is I, now?"

"Yes, Gloom, you are a detective."

"Reg'lah p'liceman?"

"Yes."

"Den whar's my blue coat an' brass buttons? Yo' neber seed a p'liceman in oberalls an' a checked shirt, did yo', boss?"

"Oh, you can't have a uniform, Gloom."

"Wha' fo'? All p'licemens hab 'em dat I eber see. Ef I don't hab it I won't know whedder I'se waitin' on de table or dribin' de'hoss or diggin' in de gyarden. Kean't tell now what I'se doin' ef I don't hab my propah suit on, I hab so many t'ings ter do. Co'se ef I hab my dribin' close on I knows I ain't wanted in de dinin'-room."

"Well, detectives wear all sorts of clothes, Gloom. If they wore a uniform, people would know that they were detectives and they couldn't detect anything."

"H'm, do dey eber do it, boss?"

"H'm, yes, occasionally, but not often. When they do, you generally hear of it."

"Den I'se ter do de detective business anytime, boss?"

"Yes, and you'll get five dollars extra when you find out who it is that does all this mischief."

"A'right, boss, I'll earn dat fl' dollahs putty soon, I tol' yo'."

Then Jim Gloom went away filled with a sense of his importance.

Now, it so happened, that Tommy Bounce had been passing under the window of the room where this little interview was held, shortly after it had begun.

He caught a few words which greatly interested him and then remained and heard the whole business.

He felt that if the professor and Gloom were plotting against him it was his duty to find out just what they were going to do.

"It isn't square to listen, as a general thing, but this is only getting hold of the enemy's plans, and everybody has a right to do that," he reasoned.

He had to smile when Jim named him as the culprit and Swish took his part, although the smile was an inward one and did not show itself upon his sober mug.

"I must tell the other chaps," he mused, when the interview was over. "This will be nuts and raisins to them. If we don't make it lively for Jim Gloom after this I'll know the reason why."

From the moment that Jim Gloom became a detective his troubles began.

He thought that he had had a hard time of it before, but now it was worse.

The boys had now some excuse for teasing him, and they exercised this right to the extent of the law.

The promise of that extra five dollars made the big coon determine to be very wary.

He was bound to earn it, and that speedily, too.

The extra work was nothing, considering the pay.

He was on the watch for the offender every spare minute.

The boys were up to his game, and made things warmer than ever for him.

They put up all sorts of jobs on him, and he always bit.

One afternoon Tommy went to him and said very mysteriously:

"Sh! Something's going to happen to-night!"

"Wha' yo' say, boy?" asked Jim, with wide open eyes.

"Something will happen to-night. Sh! Don't give it away."

"Wha' yo' mean by all dis mysteriousness-ness-ness, boy?" stammered poor Jim.

"Something's going to happen to-night, I tell you, in the barn at ten o'clock. Sh! Don't give it away."

"Wha' yo' mean?" gasped Jim.

"Never you mind. You see if something doesn't happen."

"Wha' fo' yo' tol' me dis, boy?" asked Jim, greatly puzzled.

"Because you ought to know. Don't tell a soul! Sh! Keep it dark! At the barn, ten o'clock, to-night! Sh!"

"Wha' fo' yo' make all dis pretentiousness-ness-ness-ness? Why don't yo' come right out wif de trufe?"

"Sh!" and Tommy with his finger on his lips, stole away on tiptoe.

"Now, dat's jes wha' I call nonsensicalnessness," muttered Jim. "Wondah ef dat boy knows I'se a p'liceman? Bery funny, if he do, ter come an' tell me ter look out fo' hisse'f, kase he's de bery fellah wha' do all de mischief, I took my oaf."

Jim Gloom could scarcely wait until the appointed hour, he was so anxious to know what was up.

However, there were so many things to do in and about the house, that it was quite ten o'clock before he could get away.

"I'll jes' run out to de bahn an' see wha's gwine ter happen, befo' I lock up de house, an' put out de lights," he remarked to himself as he stole outside into the darkness and silence.

Not a sound could be heard, and as Jim neared the barn his heart came up into his mouth.

The mystery greatly puzzled and frightened him as well, but he was determined to penetrate it if he broke a leg.

All was quiet at the barn, and Jim was certain that some terrible conspiracy was being hatched behind its dark and frowning walls.

If there had been a noise inside he would have dashed forward in a moment.

The silence terrified him, however, and he shook like a leaf as he advanced step by step.

He reached the little door next to the great double one in the center and listened.

He could not hear a sound.

For all that, he was convinced that some under-hand business was going on behind the door.

He tried it and found that it resisted the pressure upon it.

Then he was certain that there was mischief afoot.

The boys were in there smoking, drinking or playing cards, and it was his duty to stop them.

He put his shoulder to the door, gave it a push and sent it flying open.

The motion caused him to go into the barn after the door.

Swish!

Thump!

Ffssh!

Something struck him on the head, and then he felt a shower of something falling all over him.

It was a bag of bran which had been balanced on a stick just over the door.

The sudden push had dislodged it, and it came down, open mouthed, right on top of the coon detective.

It filled his wool, eyes, mouth, nose and ears, ran down his back, went into his shoes and piled up on his shoulders and wherever else it could find a lodgment.

The tickling sensation it produced filled Jim Gloom with fear, and he dashed out of that barn so quick that he ran slap dash into the pump before he knew where he was.

"Scuse me, sah, didn't know yo' was heah," he stammered, taking the pump for a man.

Then he retreated to the house feeling as if he had the itch.

When he got where it was light he found out what the matter was and it made him madder than ever.

"Jes' like ter know who put dat bag o' bran ober de do', I would, fo' a fac'. Gorry! look like a ghos' an' no mistook. Didn't know what had happened, fo' de life o' me. Law sakes! won't get dat stuff out'n m' ha'r an' eyes fo' days an' days. Reckon I got 'nuff ter do now wifout habin' any mo'.

Dis bein' a detective ain't what I spect. Reckon de boss wan' me ter be a station-house nex', but dere's whar I draw de line."

The next day when Jim Gloom saw little Tommy Bounce he asked, angrily:

"Wha' fo' yo' sen' me to de bahn las' night fo', h'm? I wan' yo' ter stop dis yer blame foolishness-ness-ness, does yo' heah?"

"Didn't anything happen?" asked that young innocent.

"Anyfing happen? Ob co'se dey did."

"Well, I told you there would."

"Wha' fo' yo' tol' me? Why didn't yo' tol' somebody else, h'm?"

"Thought you would like to know," answered Tommy, with all the soberness of a judge on the bench.

"Well, yo' needn't a-tol' me: yo' mought a-tol' some oder fellah, I reckon. Yo' tink I got no time 'cept to 'dulse in dis kin' ob hilariousness-ness-ness?"

"Well, something happened, anyhow," repeated Tommy, with great seriousness.

"Yo' wasn't 'bleeged to tell me 'bout it 'tall," sputtered Jim. "Tain't my business to go 'roun' nights lookin' fo' sumfin' ter happen. I'se got 'nuff ter do wifout dat. Wha' fo' yo' put dat bag o' bran right whar it fall on me?"

"What bag of bran, Mr. Gloom?"

Oli, how innocent!

"De one wha' fall on me, ob co'se."

"Did a bag of bran fall on you, Mr. Gloom?"

"Co'se dey did."

"Did it hurt the bag?"

"No, it didn't, it hurt me, fill me full o' dus'.

Wha' fo' yo' put it dere, h'm?"

"Put what where?"

"De bag ober de do'?"

"What bag?"

"De bag o' bran, ob co'se."

"What door?"

"De bahn do'. Hain' yo' got no sense 'tall?"

"When was all this?" asked Tommy stolidly.

"Las' night, ob co'se."

"The big barn or the little one?"

"De big one."

"Last night?"

"Yas, las' night," snorted Jim, getting mad.

"What time?" asked the imperturbable Tommy.
"Ten o'clock."

"Ah, thanks. I am always in bed by that time, you know, so it couldn't have been me. Ta, ta, I must go in to school."

Then Tommy walked away, while Jim Gloom looked after him and observed in tones of conviction.

"Wull, I'se sahtin ob one ting. Dat boy am eider de bigges' fool I eber see, or he am too deep fo' Jim Gloom, one or de oder."

CHAPTER VII.

"JIM GLOOM found his occupation of private detective anything but pleasant.

The boys had got onto it, and made things as lively as possible.

He had never had a very quiet time with them, but now it was Bedlam.

He was certain that Little Tommy Bounce was under the whole business, but he could not prove the first thing against that serene and quiet joker.

"Reckon de boss tink he do a smart ting when he make me detective," he growled. "'S if I didn' hab 'nuff to do in de fus' place. Den dey ain' no suit goes wif it, an' I'se eider a detective all de time or neber. How's I gwine to tell if I ain' got on de close? Dis yer bein' a special p'liceman is too much po'k fo' a shillin'."

Full of this idea Jim went to Mr. Swish at the end of five or six days of detective work and said:

"Boss, I'se gwine to frow up de job."

"What! you aren't going to leave me, are you, Gloom?"

"No, I isn't gwine ter do that, on'y ter gib up de extry wo'k. I'se tiahed ob bein' a station-house, boss."

"Oh, but think of the glory."

"Glory am a drug in de market dese days, boss."

"Isn't the reward something?"

"Boss, ef I get paid 'cordin' to der trubble I hab yo'd orter gib me a hund'ed dollahs a day fo' bein' detective. De wo'k an' de pay don' run ter-gadder nohow."

"Why, it can't be very hard, Jim, to find out who is doing all the mischief."

"Mebby it moughtn' be, boss, ef I didn' hab nuffin' else ter do, but when I'se gotter milk, feed de critters, keep de bahn an' stabul clean, frow down hay, wash de waggin, go to de willage, wait on table, put out de lights, lock up de house, make de flahs, sweep de school-room, aiah de sheets, help in de wash, kill pigs an' chickens, gadder up de leabes, ring de bell, change my duds fo'ty times a day, look aftah de young ge'men an' do 'bout fo'ty-leben hundred t'ings besides all in one day, it's axin' a leetle too much ter 'spect me ter be a p'liceman on top ob all dat, an' I isn' gwine ter do it, not fer no fl' dollahs, boss, an' dat settles it. Reckon yo' wan' me ter be judge an' jury and de lawyahs on bofe sides nex'?"

Swish did not insist, for he was afraid that Jim might possibly have stumbled upon the culprit, and in that case the coon could have claimed the five dollars.

So Jim gave up being a detective and gave his attention to his other duties, though it cannot be said that he did any more work than before.

There was a coolness between him and M'riar still, but, although he fooled away no more time in the kitchen he continued to loaf in other places.

Maybe you think that because Jim Gloom gave up detective work, his trials and tribulations ceased?

Not many.

The boys were as fly as ever, and a trifle more so, if anything.

"Chummies, what do you say to a melon party this evening?" asked Tommy Bounce one night not long after this.

"First rate," said Bob.

"Just the cheese," remarked Joe.

"I'm wid yez," added Dick.

"Count me in," vociferated Walter.

"Me, too," ejaculated Sam.

"Contrary minded?" said Tommy.

There was not a single dissenting voice.

"It is a vote. We will go."

"After the lights are out?" asked Bob.

"Yea, verily my son. You would not have us go before that."

"Well, not much."

When everything was quiet, the boys stole down to the front door, one or two at a time, and when they were all assembled Tommy let them out.

They did not care to risk going down on a rope, and besides, the little joker had found out a trick worth two of that.

He had discovered the combination, as it were, and could now unlock the big front door whenever he had a mind so to do.

It was a select little party of six or eight, just enough for company and to obviate the danger of noise or confusion, both of which might have been fatal to the success of the expedition.

Farmer Greenhouse, on the place adjoining that of Swish, had a nice little patch of late melons, which the frost had not yet touched, and which the boys had been looking at for some time with longing eyes.

Greenhouse and Swish were not on very good terms, and the farmer had more than once called the boys a lot of young ruffians, an expression of opinion which they very naturally resented.

With Tommy in the lead the boys now marched upon the farmer's melon patch where all was dark and deserted.

"I've been spotting this patch," said Tommy, "and I can tell you just what melons we want to take."

"We don't want any spotted melons," observed Bob, with a chuckle.

"All such remarks are ruled out, my facetious friend," said Tommy. "Follow me, and come where melons wait ye."

The melons Tommy had spotted proved to be dandies, and after removing three or four to a convenient distance the boys pitched in lively and enjoyed themselves.

"Don't chuck the rinds on the ground," remarked Tommy, sagaciously.

"Why not?" asked Dick.

"Well, in the first place, it is the height of rudeness to steal a man's melons and then litter up his fields with them, and in the second place it is apt to give you away."

"That is more important than the first," observed Bob.

"What'll we do with 'em?" asked Joe.

"Chuck 'em in the ditch."

The feast was going on nicely, when all of a sudden Tommy whispered:

"Cheese it! Crawl along on your hunkies till you get to the gap in the wall, and then make a break."

Some of the boys would have got on their feet and taken to their legs at once, but Tommy wouldn't let 'em.

"None o' that!" he whispered. "You'll be nabbed if you're not careful."

The retreat was made in good order, and the boys reached the road without mishap.

"I didn't hear anything," said Bob, as they hurried on.

"I did, though," said Tommy. "Light out! We haven't a second to lose!"

The boys dusted, and a moment later they heard a great hullabaloo in the melon-patch.

It was Farmer Greenhouse with a dog and a gun, loudly lamenting the loss of his melons.

Tommy, with his quick ears, had heard his first approach, and had decamped in the nick of time.

The boys kept on the dark side of the road and made good time, taking care also that no sound might reach the farmer's ears.

"What are you doing with that big melon?" asked Bob of Tommy when they were entering the school grounds.

That was the first time he had noticed it.

"I've got a use for it, my boy."

"But it will give us away."

"I think not."

They had not been followed, and in a few moments entered the house unobserved.

Tommy locked the door, and they all sneaked noiselessly up-stairs and met in the dormitory.

Tommy went up higher, got into Jim Gloom's room and put that big melon on the foot of his bed—just where the coon would see it the first thing in the morning.

When he got back to the dormitory and was undressing, Bob asked:

"Where's the big one, Tom?"

"I have put it where it will do the most good."

"Caesar's ghost! You haven't eaten the whole of that big fellow?" asked Bob, in surprise.

"Oh, I've got rid of it all right."

"Well, you'll be sick before morning, I'll bet."

"I think not," was the careless reply.

"Why, it was as big as you were."

"Oh, I can get away with bigger things than me; Jim Gloom, for instance."

He would say no more, and in a little while the boys were all sound asleep and snoozing as only boys can.

When Jim Gloom awoke in the morning his eyes fell upon that big melon first of all.

"How dat get yer?" he asked in surprise.

"Wasn't dere las' night. Wondah ef it am good fo' anyfing? Specs not. Dem boys put it dere des' ter fool me, like's not! Mought try um, dough."

Jim Gloom had all a darky's fondness for water-melons, and he hardly waited to get on his trousers and shoes before he cut into the monster on his bed.

He cut it open to start with, and the sight of its

crimson inside, black seeds and crisp heart settled him.

"Guess de boss make me a presen' ob dat melyon," he muttered, cutting off a big slice.

"Ain' so bad a fellah, aftah all, when yo' come to think ob it. M-m! dat go jes' to de right spot."

The juice ran down his shirt front and the seeds fell on the floor, but that didn't bother that coon.

When once he had found out that the melon was all right, he was not going to lose any time in getting rid of it.

Slice after slice was cut off and found its way into his big mouth.

"M-m-m! Ain' dat des de bes' ting goin'? Wull! I blebe yo'. De boss couldn' do anyfing to get my 'steem bettah dan gubin' me dat melyon. I membah dat long as I lib."

Jim's capacity for melons was commensurate with his size, but that big fellow went just a little beyond him.

Half of it was disposed of without a wink, but the next quarter went down with some difficulty.

The rind was not trimmed as close as the rest, the heart being about all he cared for.

Then he started on the last piece.

He had to give it up, though, and sticking his knife in the remains, muttered sadly:

"Guess I don' car' fo' any mo' des' now. Mout as well wait till I hab mo' appetite."

Then he dressed and went down, leaving the uneaten melon and the rinds setting in a chair.

He was kept so busy after that that he forgot all about the melon, and would not have been likely to remember it had it not been brought to his mind in the most unexpected fashion.

School had hardly opened before there came a tremendous ring at the front door.

Jim Gloom answered the summons, and found Farmer Greenhouse at the door.

"Good-mo'nin', sah," said Jim. "Anyfing I can do fo' yo' dis mo'nin'?"

"Yes, they are, yow ken take me tew yure mars-ter jest as quick ez yew know howter."

"De boss am busy wif de young ge'men, sah. I go call him."

"No yew don't. I'll see him an' them together. Young gentlemen! Young ruffians yew mean! Show me tew the skull-room quick as yew know howter, yew ebony image."

The farmer evidently knew the way without showing, and he pushed by Jim Gloom and made his way to the great school-room, followed by his dusky attendant.

This was not the first time that he had been there, for he was all the time kicking, and had forced his way into the school-house more than once for the purpose of entering a complaint.

"Mr. Swish, I've got suthin' tew say tew yew before these here young vagabonds," he began as soon as he got inside, "and I want they shud hear it as well as yew, 'cause they're jest es much interested intew it es I firmly believe, an' main—"

"Mr. Greenhouse, I would like to know whom you denominate young vagabonds before you proceed further," said Swish, very stiffly. "I am not aware that there are any such characters—"

"I mean them boys of yewrn, Mister Swish, an' yew know it, an' yew know that I can't call 'em nawthin' else. They bruk intew my place last night and stole a lot of mellins, an' I wantter tell yew—"

"One moment, Mr. Gloom?"

"Yas'r!" said Jim, stepping forward.

"You locked up last night?"

"I did, sah, an' I locks up ev'y night. You know dat, boss, well as I does."

"You saw that all the young gentlemen went to bed at the proper time?"

"Suttinly."

"And that nobody left the house after that?"

"I'd like ter cotech 'em, sah! Dey knows I'd 'port 'em ef dey did."

"Mr. Gloom is a thorough watchman, Mr. Greenhouse," continued Swish, "and it would be impossible for any one to leave the house—"

"Oh, it would, hey?" snapped the farmer, stepping forward. "What's that here on yure shirt?"

Then he reached forward and took something from the fold of Jim's blue flannel shirt.

It was a watermelon seed.

It had been deposited there when Jim had been making away with the melon, and had remained there ever since.

"Mighty good watchman, ain't he?" sneered the granger. "Reckon he helped the young ruffians eat the mellins after they'd stole 'em. 'Course he wouldn't say nawthin' after thet."

"Ain' stole no melyons!" cried Jim. "De boss gub me one, an' I eat him dis mo'nin'. Dey ain' no law 'gin eatin' melyuns dat am gub to yo."

"Oh, old Swish give yew the mellin, did he? He's as bad as the rest on 'em. 'Course he won't say nawthin' agin the thieves."

"I didn't give anybody any melons," snarled Swish. "What are you talking about, you old fool?"

"Don't yew call me an old fule, goldurn ye," snappered the hayseeder.

"I didn't, but you are one all the same. I meant Gloom."

"You did gib me de melyon, boss, don' yo' mem-bah?"

"No. I never gave you anything."

"H'm! then the nigger is the thief," sang out the farmer. "I knowed that it was some one on yew. Yure all alike. One on ye is as bad as t'other, an' I wouldn't trust—"

"Rats!" said little Tommy Bounce, in a hoarse whisper.

Nobody knew where the sound came from, but the hayseeder gave a jump and looked scared.

The first thing that hayseed delegate knew he was flying down the front stoop.

He landed on his back in the path, and then the door closed with a bang.

"Ha! I'll have damages outen him fur thet!" growled Greenhouse, getting up, brushing the dust off his faded clothes and shaking his fist at the door.

Nobody appeared, and the farmer, after waiting five or ten minutes, went away vowing vengeance.

He knew that it would not do to sue Swish, for the latter belonged to the political party then in power, and was one of the selectmen of the town, whereas he belonged to the outs and had no pull.

Tommy was so sober about it that Jim began to think that perhaps it would go bad with him after all.

"Nebor stole no melyons 'tall," he blurted out. "I des blebe dat it was you uns wha' did it, an' try to frow der blame on me."

"Oh, Mr. Gloom!" cried all those innocent boys.

"You know we couldn't get out," said Bob. "You are such a good watchman."

"Dat's so. I des like ter see yo' get out o' dis yer house when I'se watchin' yo'," said Jim Gloom with great pomposity. "Might as well try to get out ob prison."



Jim was still snoring when the boys returned, with Tommy in command, each holding a brimming bucket. They spread out in a line in front of the coon, and all hands raised their pails. "Let her go!" whispered Tommy.

"Boss, shall I give him the grand bounce?" whispered Jim to Swish.

"No, sir. If you have stolen his melons you must pay for them."

"Hahn't stole nuffin', boss. Yo' gib me dat yer melyon an' I eat it, leastwise de mos' ob it."

"I tell you I didn't give you anything."

"The goldurned nigger is the thief," snorted Greenhouse. "He'll be stealin' my chickens next, I shouldn't wonder, but if there's any lawr a the land I'll hev it outen him. Come along ere, yew mellin thief."

Farmer Greenhouse was big and rawboned and could knock down an ox, but when he undertook to fool with Jim Gloom he reckoned without his host.

"Whar yo' gwine ter took me?" asked Jim, as the granger laid hold of him and began to drag him toward the door.

"Tow the squire's, that's where, yew goldurned thief."

"Wull, I'se too busy to go dis mo'nin'. Bettah call agin."

With that Jim lifted the farmer clean off his feet, flig as he was, threw him across his shoulder, and started for the door with him on the dead trot.

He would get square with Jim Gloom, however, if it cost him all the money he had made that season.

Tommy and the boys knew his vengeful nature, and that gave them a chance to play roots on Jim.

"You will steal the farmer's melons, will you?" said Bob to Jim, on the first opportunity. "You were a fool to get caught at it, though."

"That's as good as six months in the jug," put in Dick. "Didn't you know that old Greenhouse was a terror when he got mad?"

"Sorry for you, Mr. Gloom," added Joe. "Old Swish will have to get another man, I suppose, and when you come out you'll have to look for another job."

"It's too bad you had to get caught," observed Tommy. "You might get two years for it, Jim. It's burglary, you know."

"Didn't steal no melyons, 'tall," sputtered the coon. "Don' know wha' you'se talkin' 'bout. Nebor stole nuffin'. De boss gub me dat yer fruit an' I eat em. Why wouldn' I, h'm?"

"Oh, you can't put it on Swish, Jim, you know you can't. He can fight the hayseeder, but you can't, and I know you'll get ten years for it. Sorry for you, old man."

"Well, we're sorry for you, Mr. Gloom," said Sam, wiping away a tear.

"Very sorry," cried all the boys, taking out their little wipes and putting them to their eyes.

"Wull, ef yo' didn't do it," said the big coon, "it mus' ha' been de boss. Didn't flink dat ob him, really fo' truly I didn't."

"Oh, Mr. Gloom! Such a good man! Ain't you ashamed to say that?"

"Such a nice master as he has been to you, Jim, and now you accuse him! Oh!"

"You ought to get twenty years for that," said Tommy.

Then all hands began guying that poor coon, till at last he got mad.

He grabbed up a big broom used in sweeping out the stable and charged on the party.

The boys scattered, of course, and as Jim was too big to run very fast, they soon got out of his way.

"Melons!" they all yelled at him from a safe distance.

"I'll give yo' melyons ef I des' cotch youse onst," he threatened, brandishing the broom.

"Melons!" they all yelled again, and the word became a war cry and was used whenever the big darky came in sight.

The farmer's anger did not die out, but he was

new sort of body, and Gloom heard nothing of him for a long time.

One warm, pleasant afternoon, not long after this, Jim Gloom might have been seen on the sunny side of the barn, taking a snooze.

He had an old and dilapidated arm-chair, which he had fished out of a lot of rubbish in the garret, and mended so that it would hold his capacious form.

He kept in the barn, and brought out now and then when he felt the need of a rest.

There he sat in it, tipped back against the barn in the sun, fast asleep and snoring.

Some of the boys, Little Tommy Bounce among the rest, being on the lookout for fun, found him

"Sh! don't say a word!" cautioned Tommy. "Here's a bully snap, all ready for us."

Under Tommy's guidance the boys went off to a wagon shed close at hand, where Jim kept a lot of buckets for use on the place.

There was a well close by, the water of which was as cold as ice, even in the hottest weather.

There were ten or a dozen of the boys, and as many buckets.

Jim was still snoring when the boys returned, with Tommy in command, each holding a brimming bucket.

They spread out in a line in front of the coon, and all hands raised their pails.

"Let her go!" whispered Tommy.

It was as if a waterspout had burst over the place.

CHAPTER VIII.

SWASH!

A dozen buckets of water to one darky. Cold water at that, and thrown over the said darky all at once.

Jim Gloom was the darky, and the water was thrown by Tommy Bounce and his chums.

They had found the coon sitting in an old arm-chair on the sunny side of the barn one afternoon fast asleep.

They had taken this mode of waking him up.

When they had emptied their pails they lighted out, put the pails back in the shed where they had found them and awaited developments.

Jim was literally washed out of that chair, and woke up dreaming that he was drowned.

He jumped to his feet, shook himself and looked all around.

There wasn't a soul beside himself to be seen.

And yet there he was, wringing wet, under a cloudless sky and nobody in sight.

"Dat's very funny," he observed as he shook himself like a wet puppy. "Wondah ef dat war a watah spout or what?"

He couldn't be any wetter if he had tumbled into a water butt.

The water just ran off him in streams.

"Bery queer showah, dat," he remarked, looking up and down and all around.

Just then Tommy Bounce came around the corner of the barn whistling.

"Wait till the clouds roll by" was the subject of his lay.

"Hello, Mr. Gloom, you look wet. Perspire very freely these warm days, don't you?"

"Puspiah! Wull! ef yo' call dis yer puspiahin', I reckon I does."

At that moment Bob Smiley came around the corner of the barn.

He was whistling also.

"A Life on the Ocean Wave," was the tune that he chose.

"Hallo, Jim, been in swimming?" he asked.

"What's the matter? Afraid to go in without your clothes?"

The big darky looked at the boy with disgust marked upon his ebony mug.

At that moment Dick Tucker came up whistling:

"After the Storm the Sunshine," and looking very innocent.

"Hallo, Jim, what makes you look so dry?"

Along came Joe Waters, and he was humming "The Rainy Day," with variations.

All the tunes were going at once, and they were all upon wet subjects.

Jim Gloom looked at one and another of the boys and then remarked:

"Pears to me all yo' young ge'men got wet tunes to-day. Wha' de mattah wif youse?"

The concert proceeded. Sam coming in with "A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea."

"H'm! Wait till the Clouds Roll By, Jinny! Aftah de shower, de mud. It rains an' de win' ber weary. Nice lot ob tunes yo' boys got."

"Say! 'Nuff to mak a man cotch col', jes' sh' yo'. Shake out dem tunes, dey ain too."

"Oh, Mr. Gloom! you swore!" cried all those young youths.

"Ndn', neider, I on'y said de tunes was damp. an' swarin', am it?"

"Nice day, isn't it, Jim?"

"Been showering, though, eh?"

"Just enough to lay the dust."

"Healthy, though, isn't it?"

"H'm wha' yo' mean by all dis anxiousness-ness-ness," sputtered Gloom. "Yo' never car' wha' happen to dis ge'man befo'. Don' yo' spose I kin smell a mouse?"

"You've got nose enough," replied Tommy, at which all the rest gave a great snort.

"Wha' fo' yo' bodder me wif all dis consequen-sciuousness-ness-ness?" stammered the darky, getting excited.

"S'pose I do get a little bit wet wha' dat to youse, h'm?"

"A little bit!" howled the boys.

"You must have run against a waterspout."

"Stayed under the drain last night, didn't you?"

"Been taking a nap in a water cart?"

"No, I habn', an' it ain' none o' youse bizness whar I been. Get out ob heah, all ob yo', else I gib yo' one warmin', I tol' yo'."

The boys retreated, whistling those airs which brought up memories of water and rain and all that sort of thing.

Jim Gloom looked more disgusted than ever, for he knew that the boys had had something to do with his ducking although he had no proof.

"Neber could rain like all dat and be so dry fi' minnits aftahwuds, nohow," he mused.

"Bery funny all dem boys come roun' des at dat time an' dat dey all whistle sump'n wet, ef dey didn' know 'bout it. Maybe I gets my han' on de fellah some day wha' put dem all up to mischief, eben ef I isn' a detective p'liceman no mo'. Be some sass'-factum to gib him a good shockin'-up on my own 'count."

So saying the irate Jim Gloom took himself off, and proceeded to array himself in dry garments, making up his mind at the same time to abstain from sleeping in exposed places thereafter, or at least, to keep one eye open if he did so, so as to watch those very troublesome boys.

For some days subsequent to the incidents related above the weather remained exceedingly warm and pleasant.

It was something like summer holding autumn back, and the days were as mild and balmy as one could wish.

You may be sure that the boys took advantage of the warm spell, for they knew that as soon as the aboriginal summer was ended the frost would come, and icy winter would make them all hus-tle.

One warm afternoon, when school was over, Tommy proposed that they all go to the river and have one last swim.

Bob seconded the proposition, and it was carried without a dissenting vote.

There were some old maids living near the place where the boys generally bathed, and as they were a cranky set, Mr. Swish had made it a rule that none of the boys must go in without bathing-suits of some sort.

The sort most in favor with the boys was what is called a "smile," being a short trunk which gave free play to the limbs, and yet prevented them from being called nude.

Providing themselves with the aforementioned ballet costumes and some towels, Tommy, Bob, Dick, Joe, Sam and one or two others, hied themselves to the river's brink, and were soon enjoying a dandy old swim.

There was a dilapidated old scow drawn up on the bank, and presently they amused themselves by putting it in the water and diving from the seats.

"The old thing leaks like a sieve," remarked Tommy, presently. "If we don't look out she'll go to the bottom before we know it."

"Let's haul her in nearer to the bank then," suggested Rob. "We may want to have some more fun with her some day."

"Hallo! here comes Jim Gloom," exclaimed Dick. "Wonder what he wants?"

The boat was hauled up close to the bank, and Tommy threw a lot of dry grass in the bottom.

Presently along came Gloom, who looked at the boys and said:

"Don' one ob yo' young ge'men wanten go crosst de riber an' deliber a letter to ole Miss Ferguson?"

"I'd be delighted," said Tommy. "Shall I go just as I am?"

"H'm! reckon dat ole maid be scared to deff if yo' did," chuckled Jim. "Couldn' yo' put on yo' close?"

"The old maids don't like us boys very well," said Tommy, "and it's too far to go by the bridge."

"Yo' got a date, habn't yo'?"

"Yes, but no date."

"H'm! dat's sad. I spees I hab to walk, an' de missus an' a drefful hurry."

"We will take you over, Mr. Gloom," said the bliging Tommy.

"How yo' do dat, Netch Tom?"

"Why, you get in the boat, and we will push you across."

"Swimmin'?"

"Cert."

"Why kean't de oder fellahs push yo' crosst?"

"What! In this suit?"

"Ob co'se not. Put on your close fust."

"We'll have you over there while I'm dressing, Mr. Gloom."

"Dat's so, an' I'se in a drefful hurry."

"Jump right in, and we'll have you over in a jiffy."

"Guess I will."

Tommy winked at his chums, and they knew right away that fun was coming.

Jim Gloom took his seat in the boat, putting his feet on the dry grass which Tommy had thrown in the bottom.

If the water had been a little less deep, the boat would have grounded as soon as that big coon stepped in; but Little Tommy Bounce had given a shove at the right moment, and it was now in deep water.

The boys swam alongside and behind the boat, impelling with one hand and swimming with the other, and the coon was getting a free ride.

The water began to come in as soon as they left the shore, but Jim Gloom did not observe it till they had nearly reached mid stream.

Then he chanced to look down, and saw that his feet were nearly covered, and it took a pile of water to do that.

"Whoa dar! de boat am leakin'!" he cried. "De watah am comin' in so fas' yo' kean't stop it. Hurry up, young ge'men, ef yo' don' wan' me to go to de bottom ob de riber."

Tommy just then made a discovery.

In a moment he backed away from the boat, and winked to the rest to do the same.

Then he whispered something in their ears and pointed, and they all smiled.

"Hi-hi! Where yo' gwine all of a sudden?" cried Jim Gloom jumping up. "Wha' fo' yo' go an' leabe me like dis?"

"Guess you can walk the rest of the way, Jim," said Rob.

"Walk! Wif de watah sebenteen foot deep! Guess yo' mus' be crazy."

The water was coming in at a most lively rate, and Jim Gloom stood upon the seat to keep his feet dry.

The boys swum around the boat, but did not offer to touch it, and at every instant the water in the bottom grew deeper.

"Don' go fo' to leabe me, young ge'men," cried Jim, getting scared. "Dis yer boat jes' take in watah like a strainah, an' putty soon she be choek full up to de muzzle."

The boys only laughed at this, and all the while the water got deeper.

"Don' go an' leabe me like dis," cried Gloom. "I kean't swim a stroke an' I'se in a awful hurry."

"You haven't treated us right, Jim, and this is to pay for it."

"Fo' goodness sake! yo' leabe me to get drowned?"

"That's about it, if you can't swim."

"I giv yo' anyting yo' want ef yo' took me to sho'. 'Tain' me wha' treat yo' bad, it am de boss. He'm de meanes' man yo' eber see."

"You're just as bad," chuckled Dick, "and you need baptizing to make a good nigger of you."

"Was baptized year ago, down to de Co'nahs, in de Baptis' chu'ch."

"Did it overflow the tank?" asked Joe, with a snort.

"Stop yo' laffin', you bad feller! Ef ye' drowned me, I come an' wisit yo' in yo' dreams, an' ha'n't yo' long as yo' lib."

"Better say your prayers, Jim," laughed Sam, "That old tub will sink in a few seconds."

In fact the water had reached the seats, as it was.

Suddenly, however, the boat got a bump and then stopped.

What was the matter?

Surely it could not have reached the bottom so soon?

There were the boys not ten feet away, swimming in water that was considerably over their heads, and yet the boat was stationary.

What was the reason of this?

The reason was that the boat had grounded on a sand bar.

Tommy had suddenly discovered it, and that was why he had abandoned the boat.

He saw a good chance to play roots on Jim Gloom, and he jumped on it with both feet.

The sudden shock nearly overturned the big darky.

He caught his balance, however, and looked around him.

"Tank goodness I'se saved dis time!" he muttered. "De boat hab gone 'sho' ob horse'f."

"Oh, yes, a fat lot!" laughed the boys. The boat could not sink any further, but Jim was no better off for all that.

"Oh, you're all right," said Dick. "You won't be drowned this time, Mr. Gloom."

"Maybe he wasn't born to be drowned, anyhow," chuckled Bob.

Then the boys swam back to shore, leaving Jim Gloom on the sand bank.

"You're all right, Jim, you can't sink," they shouted.

"Come back heah dis minnit an' took me asho'!" he yelled.

"Oh, you're all right!" and then they went upon the bank and began to dress.

my, with an expressive wink. "Come on, fellows."

The boys then threw off their clothes—those who had them on—and all hands dove into the river and swam out to the bar.

"We shall have to bail out the boat before we can get her afloat," said Tommy. "Mr. Gloom, you will have to stand on the bar till we do it. You won't mind that, will you?"

"Why kean' yo' bail um out wif me standin' on de seat?" asked the coon.

"Why, you see, we have no dippers nor pails, and the boat will have to be turned over to get the water out."

righted the boat and gave it a shove out into the stream.

"Tra-la-la, James!" cried Tommy as he swam after it.

"See you later, old man!" cried the others as they followed Tommy.

Jim Gloom was left on the bar, standing in water half way up to the knees and holding his shoes and stockings in one hand.

The boys caught up with the boat and shoved it toward the shore, where they soon had it high and dry on the bank.

Then they proceeded to take off and wring out their tights.



"Dat's very funny," he observed as he shook himself like a wet puppy. "Wondah ef dat war a watah spout or what?"

He couldn't be any wetter if he had tumbled into a water butt. The water just ran off him in streams.

"Bery queer showah, dat," he remarked, looking up and down and all around.

Gloom saw what the matter was, and knew now why the boat did not sink any deeper, but that did not mend matters any.

He could not walk a shore, for the water on the other side of the bar, and between him and the shore, was away over his head.

"Drat dem boys," he cried. "Dey am dey worses' lot I eber did see. Ef I hab my way I spell de hull lot ob dem f'om de school."

"How do you like it out there, Jim?"

"Shall we bring you out a bed and an umbrella?"

"Good chance to learn how to swim, Jim."

"Jump in, Mr. Gloom. You'll make a tidal wave that'll carry you to shore surely."

"I tol' de boss on yo' fellahs, eve'y one ob yo', jos' see if I don' now," retorted Jim. "I get yo' all de bounce."

"Oh, yes, we'll help you after that!" said the boys.

Our African friend then perceived that he had made a big mistake.

He proceeded to rectify it without delay.

"Hol' on," he shouted. "Yo' come ober an' took me 'crosst an' I say nuffin' 'bout it."

"We might as well help him, boys," said Tom-

"Yo' dun' tink de san' 'll go 'way while I'se stanin' on it, does yo'?"

"Oh, no. I guess not."

"Den I has to get my shoes an' stockin's wet, Mastah Tommy?"

"You can take 'em off, and roll up your pants."

"Dat's so. Neber flinked ob dat."

Gloom proceeded to remove his shoes and stockings which he placed on the seat, and then rolled his trousers up as far as his knees.

Taking his shoes in his hands he then stepped out on the bar, and the boat rose several inches.

"My golly! de watah am bery col'!" he ejaculated. "Hurry up wif dat boat, won' yo' young ge'men?"

"Oh, yes, we'll hurry," said Tommy, and he and the rest proceeded to turn the old tub over.

The water ran out and the big coon was splattered, but he did not care to move away for fear he would get into the deep water.

"We can't do anything here," said Tommy wisely. "The water comes in as fast as we turn it out. We must take it to shore and dump it."

Jim Gloom made no objection, and it would not have mattered if he had.

The boys got most of the water out, and then

After this they made a rush for their hats, to see who would be covered first.

Tommy Bounce wasn't the last one, you can bet.

Then they grabbed up their shirts and got into them, after which they leisurely proceeded to put on the rest of their duds.

Jim Gloom viewed these proceedings with alarm.

It looked as if he was going to be left.

"Hol' on dere!" he bawled. "Ain' yo' gwine to come aftah me, fus'?"

It didn't look that way.

Having put on their trousers and jackets, the boys sat down on the bank and drew on their stockings and shoes with great deliberation.

"Hi-hi, hol' on! Don' do dat till yo' come fo' me! Yo' get yo' foots wet if yo' do!" he roared.

Jim Gloom had a big voice when he chose to let it out, and you could have heard him just then as far as the schoolhouse.

The boys paid no attention to him, however.

Having put on their shoes and laced or buttoned them, they left the shore.

Jim Gloom saw them disappear among the trees, and was very mad.

"How dem young loafers get 'long wifout me?" he sputtered. "Eve'yt'ing go ter destructum now

fo' shuah. Dey am nuffin done when I isn't roun' ter see ter it. Dey's de mos' foolishis' fellahs I eber did see. Dey's jes' cuttin' off dey own noses, dey is. Might know de hull 'stablishment go ter pieces ef I ain' dere ter see aftah it."

The boys had gone, however, and there he was standing on a sand bank in the middle of the river, with no means of reaching the bank.

Wasn't it cruel of those boys to go away and leave him like that.

It might have been, but Tommy knew something that Jim Gloom didn't.

"He'll be all right," he said, and then he communicated a little piece of information to his chums.

"We'll watch and see the rest of the fun," he said, soberly, for the young imp never laughed if he could possibly avoid it.

The boys found a good place where they could watch the big coon without being seen themselves, and awaited developments.

"Don't he look pretty?" whispered Bob, with a grin.

Poor Jim Gloom was still standing on the bar, holding his shoes and looking wistfully at the bank.

Then he yelled for help as loud as he could yell. Would it do any good?"

Wait.

CHAPTER IX.

JIM GLOOM had been standing on the sand bank in the middle of the river, nearly up to his knees in water, holding his shoes in his hands, for some minutes after the boys had disappeared, when he suddenly let out a fearful yell for help.

Was it heard?

You just bet it was, and the people in the village, three miles off, wondered if there was another earthquake.

Jim need not have yelled so loud, for help was nearer than he supposed.

A boat containing two men and a boy was coming down the river, and had nearly reached him when he let out that yell.

Tommy had known this for some time, but Jim Gloom did not.

If Tommy had not known it he would not have left Jim on the bar as he had done.

The minute that coon saw the boat he yelled out:

"Hi-hi, dere, yo' fellah in de boat! Come an' took me off dis yer san' bank fore it breaks away."

When the men saw Gloom they just rested on their oars and let out a laugh.

It was too comical a sight to let pass without some demonstration.

"Ho-ho-ho! Look at that big nigger. It's a wonder the sand bank don't sink."

"He-he-he! Don't believe we can take him in; he'll swamp us, he's so big."

"Well, if that ain't the funniest thing I've seen since Sal Jones' funeral."

"Stop yo' laffin' an' come took me off," said Jim indignantly. "Specs I kin stan' yer catchin' col' while yo' uns stay dere laffin' at me?"

"How did you get on the bank, anyhow, Snowflake?"

"Dem bad boys 'low dey'd took me ober, and when dey git dis far dey let de boat sink, an' I see in a drefful hurry, too."

"H'm, if you sink a boat I don't think it's safe to take you in."

"De boat warn't no good, sah, all full ob holes, jes' like a sieve. Don' keep me stannin' yer cotechin' my deff ob de rheumatism."

Finally, when the men and the boy had laughed all they wanted to, they pulled up to the bank and let Jim get in.

His extra weight made them go a-ground, however, and they couldn't stir the boat an inch.

"You'll have to get out, Blackey, and give us a push, and then you can jump in afterward," said one of the men.

The coon did as suggested.

He stepped out and the boat arose from the bank.

Then he gave it a shove.

He had to make a flying jump at the last, or he would have been left.

The result was that he fell on his nose in the bottom.

Then the men and the boy laughed all the harder, of course.

Jim didn't care, so long as he was in the boat.

"Where do you want to go?" asked one of the men.

"Jes' across dere to de bank, where yo' see de white stones."

"We're going down to the bridge, there's a better landing place there."

The bridge, by the way, was half a mile further down the river.

"Couldn't yo' lan' me heah, sah? I see in a bery great hurry."

"I'm afraid we couldn't get near enough with you in. You're the heaviest cargo I ever carried."

Jim thought the men were in earnest and began to feel very sad.

He would have to return by the bridge, as it was not likely the men would wait for him, and he did not care to extend the journey.

"If I don' deliber dis yer note dis bery minute, somebody die fo' shuah!" he exclaimed in great trepidation.

The men laughed and rowed him within a foot or two of the bank.

"There you are, Snowball! You'll have to jump the rest of the way. We're on the bottom now."

Jim got upon the forward thwart and jumped.

The boat flew from under him the moment he leaped.

He fell short of course, and went into the water up to his waist.

Then the boatmen laughed again and went on down the river.

"Some folks am jes' too fresh to get along comfortably," muttered the coon, as he recovered one of his big shoes which he had dropped.

Then he stepped ashore, shook himself and sat down to put on his shoes and stockings.

"It am all along ob dem boys," he muttered. "Reckon I git dat fi' dollahs de boss promise me, yet, ef I want take de trouble."

It was a sorry looking coon that delivered the note to the old maids, and they were not going to let him into the yard at first sight, but called the dogs and set them on him.

However, the dogs recognized him, and did not chew him up as the old maids expected, so that he was enabled to deliver his message in safety.

Then he returned to the school by the way of the bridge, having had all he wanted of the river.

He was late, of course, and Swish gave him a great blowing up for loitering and fooling away his time.

"Now look yere, boss," said Jim, in high dudgeon, "ef yo' don' like de way I does tings, yo' bettah get some un else. 'Stead o' foolin' away de time, I was jes' pestered mos' to deff by de young ge'men ob de school, an' made to lose a hull hour, an' all my wo'k to be done. Don' talk ter me 'bout loafin'." Reckon ef yo had de wo'k to do dat I has, yo'd be glad to res' yo'se'f 'casionally, h'm!"

With that Jim went off with his nose in the air, leaving Swish to his own reflections.

A week or so after this there was a sudden change in the weather, and heavy overcoats were quite the proper thing.

The frost opened the chestnut burrs and scattered the walnuts on the ground; molasses candy was ripe and pop-corn was right in season.

Tommy and the rest of the boys made an early expedition to the woods, and brought back enough nuts of all kinds to last them through the winter.

The fall days brought lots of fun, and Jim Gloom enjoyed a good rest, as the boys were out of doors so much that they had no time to devote to him.

"Guess dem boys t'ink it's 'bout time to 'have demselves," he mused. "Reckon dey knows I see onto deir tricks, an' dat I see boun' ter 'spose dem fo' long ef dey don' look out. Dey'd jes' bettah look out. Neber did see sech doin's sence I been yer."

Jim's time was coming, however, so he need not have been so fly after all.

The autumn merged into winter before any one knew it was coming, and by Thanksgiving the ground was covered with snow and the river was a mass of ice.

Then there was fun, as all country boys must know, and our young hero just let himself loose in enjoying it.

What jolly coasting there was on the long hill down by the river, and how the boys did enjoy it on moonlight nights, particularly if the girls of the neighborhood happened to be about.

Then there was the skating and the bonfires and the snaring rabbits, shooting squirrels and partridges, trapping muskrats, and all that sort of thing, such as fishing through the ice, building snow forts and defending them, and playing at camping out in the woods.

In fact there was fun of all sorts to be had, and Little Tommy Bounce was just the sort of boy to go in for the whole of it, and to be at the top of the heap in his lessons besides, for the harder a boy plays the harder he will buckle down to business, and you can just chalk that on your cuffs for future reference.

Well, in the course of time Christmas came along, and the boys were expecting a grand time. Many of them were going home to spend the holidays, but quite a number expected to remain at the school, the distance being too great to allow them to leave.

Little Tommy Bounce was one of those who were to stay, and all the boys of Number Six were to do the same, so that there was plenty of fun in prospect.

The majority of those who were going away did not propose to leave until Christmas morning by the first train, as old Swish intended to have a blow-out on Christmas Eve.

The master occasionally let himself out, for the sake of policy, and this was one of the few occasions on which he allowed himself to be generous.

He was to give the boys a grand, extra fine, gilt-edged, first-water, twenty-four karat dinner, and in the evening the swell families of the place were to be invited in, and jollity was to reign supreme.

The dinner was to be given at seven, the boys were expected to put on their best clothes, while old Swish and his lady would blossom out in a style such as old Solomon and the Queen of Sheba never dreamed of.

The very top notch, and jumping-off-place of style, however, would be reached by Jim Gloom, who was to wear a new full-dress suit that would put Prince Esterhazy or the Dauphin of France completely in the shade.

You ought to have seen him when he was dressed for the grand occasion.

Swish had an eye to style when he hired that nigger, you can bet.

There never was such elegant, lustrous black broadcloth nor such superlatively dazzling gilt buttons, nor such immaculately white and shining a shirt-front, nor such dizzily irradiant a white waistcoat, and as for the collar and cravat, why, they would just make the angels weep with envy to gaze at they were so stunning.

Gloom felt his importance, too, to the very last ounce or fraction thereof, and no master of ceremonies at a court ball could be more dignified.

It was too bad of Tommy Bounce to put up a job on that coon on such an occasion, but he did it all the same.

Moreover, he inveigled his chums into helping him carry out his nefarious schemes which made it a great deal worse.

All the arrangements for the dinner, which was to be something extra, had been made, and all hands expected the swellest kind of a time.

During the afternoon Tommy, Bob and Dick were off on the river in their fur-lined overcoats and seal-skin caps, enjoying the ice, their skates being sharpened up to the nines and their spirits away up to boiling point.

On the way home, just before dusk, they met a couple of weary-looking tramps on the road.

The tramps looked wicked, but the boys were not afraid of them for a cent's worth.

Robbery had been the first intention of those two bums, but a single glance at the boys made them change their minds.

"Say, young fellers, you look kind o' happy," said the spokesman.

"We feel so," said Tommy.

"Couldn't ye give a couple of old snoozers a Christmas present just fer once. It wouldn't hurt yer and it would go fast rate with us."

"Think I will. How would you like a dollar apiece and a suit of clothes?"

"Now yer just taking us where we live, young feller."

"And you can sleep in the barn, but mind you, no smoking."

"Wouldn't think o' such a thing."

"We don't eat chicken, we don't. We leave that to vulgar people."

"In return for all this I want you to do a little work."

At the mention of such a thing both tramps put on a look of disgust.

If they had to work for their presents, they might as well not have them.

They began to edge away, while the leader remarked:

"Ah, go take a walk! We ain't lookin' fer work. What is there about us that made yer think that?"

Tommy laughed at this remark and replied:

"The only working you will be required to do is to work a snap on the big coon up at the house."

"Play roots on him?"

"That's it."

"Put up a job?"

"Exactly."

"Why didn't you say so? The only thing we work is a free lunch route."

"Yes; you don't look like knights of labor."

"No, we're only walking delegates, and walking don't agree with us."

"Well, come up to the barn and I'll tell you what I want. No funny business, now. If any of the mowing machines or hay scales are stolen we'll put the constables on you deuced quick."

"Why, we wouldn't steal a single potato, young feller."

"I suppose not. It wouldn't be enough; you'd want a barrel."

"Guess you must know us," said the second tramp, who, until then, had left the chinning to his companion.

"Well, I guess you are good samples of a pretty large class," said Tommy, with a wink.

He then took the two wanderers up to the barn, stowed them away in the hay, smuggled out some grub and told them what they were to do.

"You kin depend on us, young feller," said the boss tramp with a broad grin when he had received his instructions. "We'll make that ducky feel the sickest that he ever was."

"That's right," returned Tommy. "See that you do," and with that he and his chums left the tramps to themselves.

apron and cap, and putting it alongside the turkey.

As he was leaving the room, one of the boys caught the coon by the sleeve, and whispered in his ear:

"In the barn, Jim."

"Wha' dat?" asked the ducky, inclining his head.

"Go look in the barn," whispered the boy.

"You'll catch 'em sure. They're up to a lark."

"Bet yo' life I cotch 'em," muttered Gloom, as he left the dining-room.

He had scarcely departed when Tommy and his chums, in evening dress, and looking as pretty as

an evening suit, and this seemed just the moment for him to act.

Grabbing hold of the door, he suddenly yanked it open and sprang inside.

Then he flashed the light of his big lantern over the scene and roared:

"Now I'se got yo' fo' shuah, yo' young willins!"

"You have, hey?"

Jim Gloom drew back, half-scared to death.

Instead of the boys, he found himself face to face with a couple of wicked-looking tramps.

Each tramp held a big horse-pistol in his hand, and leveled it straight at the coon's head.

"We've got you, you'd better say!" growled one



Each tramp held a big horse-pistol in his hand, and leveled it straight at the coon's head. "We've got you, you'd better say!" growled one of the tramps. "Come in here and peel off them duds, or we'll blow the top of your head clean off."

Well, at last the dinner hour arrived, and everything was ready.

Jim Gloom rang the big bell, and the boys filed in, looking as smart as could be in their best clothes.

When they were about to sit down Swish looked around and noticed that five or six boys were absent.

Tommy Bounce and his chums were the absentees.

"Where are Bounce, Smiley, Tucker, Waters and Sloan?" he asked, looking at Jim, who was coming in with a big turkey at that moment.

"Don't know, boss," said Jim, putting down the platter.

"Well, it's very strange that they must be late upon such an occasion."

"Hain't seed um, boss, but I jes' spect dey am up to some mischief or noder. Dat Little Tommy Bounce am de worses' boy in de hull school."

"Go and find him, sir," said Swish, "him and his companions. I can't have the whole dinner spoiled in this way."

"Oh, dey am up to some high jinks, I s'pose," said Jim, taking a big, steaming chicken pie from M'riar, who came in, rigged out in a shiny white

little red wagons, came in and took their places at the table.

They looked so giddy that Swish said nothing, and the dinner proceeded.

Gloom in the meantime had put on a hat, found and lighted a big lantern, and started for the barn.

"I cotch dem fellahs, shuah," he chuckled, "an' show de boss dat I kin 'arn dat fi' dollahs s'well as de nex' fellah."

The wind howled and whistled and sent the light snow down his neck and into his face, while the nipping and eager air made his dress suit feel anything but comfortable.

"Gorry, dis am de coldes' night befo' Chris'mus I eber see," he muttered with chattering teeth. "Guess ol' Santa Claus wanter bundle up pretty wahn to-night when he go him rounds."

When he reached the barn door he paused for a moment to listen.

He could hear some one moving around inside, and could catch the sound of voices, although he could not distinguish whos, they were.

"We'll do that nigger up this time for sure," he heard some one say presently.

Now was the time for him to make his appearance.

It was too cold to stand out there in nothing but

of the tramps. "Come in here and peel off them duds, or we'll blow the top of your head clean off!"

Jim might not have been afraid of the tramps, but he had a most wholesome horror of the two big horse-pistols.

He shook like a leaf, and would have let the lantern fall from his grasp if one of the tramps had not seized it.

He hung it on a peg near by, and then the other tramp grabbed the coon and yanked him forward a few paces.

"We want that suit," said the first tramp, pointing his pistol at Jim, while the other stood against the door.

"I get you one ob my ol' suits, mistah, if yo' wait a secon'," said Gloom, shaking all over.

"We want this one," and the fellow flourished his pistol.

If Jim had only known that it wasn't loaded and was broken in the bargain!

"Peel!" said the tramp, menacingly, and Jim Gloom began to do so.

Off came his coat, and there he stood in his shirt-sleeves, shaking as if he had a fit.

"Now the vest and the breeches."

"Yo' ain' gwine ter make me take off ev'ryt'ing?" stammered Jim. "I cotch my deff shuah."
 "Shut up and do as I tell yer," and the big pistol was shoved right under Gloom's nose.
 "Don' shoot, dat's a good tramp, an' I does eb'ryt'ing yo' wan' me ter," cried Jim, proceeding to comply with the tramp's request.
 This was a bully Christmas-eve experience!

CHAPTER X.

THOSE two bad, wicked tramps, hired by little Tommy Bounce, forced Jim Gloom to strip clean down to his undergarments.

He wanted to lick them and could have done it easily enough, but the sight of two huge pistols shoved under his sniffer totally unnerved him.

He did what he was told to do, consequently, and stood in his shoes and underclothes, trembling with fear and the cold.

"Now, you kin put on these things," said the chief tramp, taking off a dilapidated coat, a back number vest and a pair of trousers that might have been chucked out of the ark, they were so old and used up.

"Put on dem ol' tings?" repeated Jim, in great disgust.

"Yes, and be quick about it," said the tramp, retreating to a dark corner behind the hay.

"And don't you dare leave this place for half an hour," said the other tramp, putting his pistol close to Jim's head. "If yer do, ye'll get blowed up. Do ye understand that?"

You bet he understood it.

He got into those clothes, too, in a hurry.

They were dirty and ragged and did not smell very nice, but they were warmer than none, and so he got into them.

Then one of the tramps brought out a pot of white paint and a brush and frescoed that big coon's face.

He put a big cross on each cheek, a scull on his forehead, and a dagger on his chin.

Jim did not like it, but the tramp had only to raise the big pistol and the coon obeyed.

"Now if ye go out o' here before the time some of the gang'll see yer and ye'll be sorry."

Poor Jim shook as if he had a chill.

"Remember," said the first tramp when they were leaving, "don't yer dare go away from this place for half an hour."

"No, sah!" said Gloom, scared out of his wits.

Then the tramps went out and he was left to himself, feeling anything but cheerful.

He waited and waited, getting colder every minute, until at last he began to sneeze.

Then he became afraid that the gang would hear him, and come and slug him, and he nearly bursted a blood-vessel in trying to keep the sneeze to himself.

Then he waited some more, and at last got so cold that he felt sure that the time must be a good deal more than up.

It wasn't half up, however, and the tramps, cuddling up in a shed next to the kitchen, wondered whether he would stay the half hour, out or not, and chuckled to themselves.

Finally, at the end of fifteen minutes, the poor coon made up his mind to make a break.

If he stayed there any longer, he would be frozen to death.

"Reckon de time am up now," he mused, "an' I don' car' ef it isn'. I'se gwine ter make a run fo' it, an' tell de boss."

He crept cautiously to the door, looked all around, and then made a dash for the house.

A few seconds later he came flying into the dining-room, where Swish, his wife, the teachers and the boys were enjoying the jolliest dinner that ever was.

"Oh, boss! here's fo'ty-leben robbers in de bahn," he burst out, "an' dey's gwine ter steal all de cows an' hosses, an' all de waggins and ev'yt'ing if yo' don' come putty quick."

The appearance of that coon in ragged misfits, and with his black face marked all over with white figures was something startling to say the least.

The boys giggled, Mrs. Swish screamed and M'ria, who was waiting on the table, just bellowed.

Swish sprang from his seat, rapped on the table with his knife and said, fiercely:

"What do you mean, sir, by coming into the room looking like that? Go and put on your clothes, and attend to your duties at once."

"Dese am all de close I got, boss," said Gloom.

"Nonsense! Where is your dress-suit? You have been drinking my wine, sir, and are out of your senses."

"No, I isn', boss. I'se tellin' yo' de trufe. De robbers took all my close and gabe me dese. Dey hel' a cannon undah my nose an' sayed dey'd shoot if I didn' gib up eb'ryt'ing, yas dey did, boss."

"Robbers!" cried Swish. "What rubbish is this you are talking? You are drunk, sir, drunk!"

Wish I was, boss, den I feel wahm. Woo-oo-oo! I'se mos' froze ter deff. Kershoo!"

"Go and put on some decent clothes and wash your face, sir," commanded Swish.

"Yes, sah, but de robbers done stole my close, I tol' yo', an' I kean't put 'em on."

"Where did you see them? You had no right to leave the house while we were at dinner."

"Out in de bahn, boss. I wen' out dere to cotch little Tommy Bounce up to some of he mischief."

"Master Bounce is here, and has been here all the time."

"Well, de robbers was in de bahn, boss, an' I reckon dat little willin' tol' 'em to wait fo' me. He am at de bottom ob dis, I'll bet fi' dollah."

"Nonsense! Go and dress at once and bring in the coffee and dessert."

"But I ain't got no swaller-tail coat, boss, 'less I put on de ole one, an' dat am too tight."

"Lick and Strapper, go out to the barn and see what's there," said Swish. "I want to see if this fellow is lying or not."

The two assistants left the room, and Jim Gloom stood in a corner with all the boys laughing at him.

"Wish you a merry Christmas, Mr. Gloom," said Tommy.

"Don' you speak to me, sah," growled Gloom. "Dis am some o' yo' wo'k, I bet a dollah."

Presently the two teachers returned, bringing with them some articles of clothing.

They held these up before the whole crowd so that all hands could see what they were.

Jim Gloom's dress suit and shirt!

The big coon's eyes nearly fell from their sockets. All the boys tittered.

M'ria just shrieked.

Mrs. Swish hid her face behind her hands.

Swish looked more indignant than ever.

"Huh! dat no-'count nigger rob hese'f, so him kin get mo' close," said M'ria, with a snort.

"So, so, your story of robbers is all a fabrication, is it?" said Swish, sternly. "Go put on your clothes and wash your face. If I see any more nonsense like this, I'll discharge you."

Gloom took his clothes and went off feeling very sad and all broken up.

He was puzzled to know how his clothes happened to come back and couldn't make it out at all.

Perhaps Tommy Bounce could have enlightened him.

The latter was not asked, however, though Jim said as he went out:

"Dis am some ob yo' wo'k, sah, but I'll cotch yo' at it some ob dese days, an' den yo'll get de gran' bounce, yo' see ef yo' don'."

"Silence!" commanded old Swish, and Jim slunk off in disgrace.

He reappeared in time, looking as gorgeous as before, and full of mad, too, in the bargain.

His face looked as if he had caught the white small-pox, for he had not been able to get all the paint off and was spotted all over.

"Wait till I cotch dat little Tommy Bounce at him tricks," he muttered wrathfully as he served the dessert. "I fix him! Yo' jes' see ef I don', so he won' fo'git Jim Gloom in a long time."

Well, the dinner was a big success, as was the party in the evening, and for once the boys had all they wanted.

The guests, who did not know how things went on at other times, concluded that Swish must be the most generous of men, and thought that the boys must think the world of him, which was just what that crafty old shark wished them to think.

The next day was Christmas, there were no lessons to be learned, most of the boys had gone away, and Tommy and three or four of his closest chums had the field to themselves.

Jim Gloom would have been just as well satisfied if Tommy had gone off with the other boys.

"Dat little Tommy Bounce am de cause of all de trouble on dis place," he remarked, "an' ef de boss was wise he wouldn't let him stay yer, but dat's jes' like some folkses, dey jes' tink's mo' ob de money dan dey does ob deir comfo't. Yo' bet I sen' dat boy home quick 'nuff ef dey axes me wha' ter do wif him."

Tommy and his friends were too busy, for a few days, to think of bothering the coon, and the latter had a rest.

On New Year's eve there was to be a watch meeting in the colored church at the Corners, a mile or two from the school, and Jim thought he would take it in.

He did not care so much for the religious exercises as he did for the chance of meeting his friends, mashing the female coons and hearing the latest news from Darkytown.

As it was vacation there was not so very much to do around the place, and Jim could lie abed of a morning without getting blown up for it, so that he could attend the meeting easily enough.

Tommy found out that Jim was going to the

watch meeting, and determined to put up a job on him by way of variety.

Bob, Dick and Sam were let into it, and all the arrangements were made, while Jim Gloom was shouting and singing at the meeting.

On the way home he had to pass by a wood where there was a little hut which had once been occupied by some railroad surveyors, but was now empty.

Just before he got to this place he heard voices ahead of him, and discovered, to his surprise, that somebody was talking about him.

"We'll fix that nigger, too," said one voice.

"Yes, and give old Swish the dandiest scare he ever had," added another.

"Wouldn't that big moke like to find this out?" remarked a third. "He would get that five dollars sure."

"Fo' goodness sake! dem boys am up to debility agin," muttered Jim. "Bet yo' life I fin' out dis time, who it am dat do all de mischief."

He could just make out that there were three or four boys in the path, but that was all.

They were so bundled up and their voices were so blended together that he couldn't tell for the life of him who they were, though he knew that they were some of the boys from the school.

He crept up cautiously, determined to discover their identity when the whole company suddenly entered the abandoned shanty and closed the door.

There was one window, covered with an old white curtain, and in a few minutes a light appeared behind it, throwing the shadow of two figures on its surface.

"H'm! Now I fin' out who dey am," muttered Gloom, as he took a position behind a tree where he could watch the shanty.

The shadows remained on the window, and from their position, it was evident that the persons who made them were in earnest conversation.

They were close together, their heads nearly touching, and one seemed to be whispering a dead secret in the ears of the other.

"H'm! Let dem talk all dey're a min' ter. I cotch 'em dis time shuah's yo' bo'n. I made up my min' long 'go I war gwine ter fin' out suffin' an' dis time I foun' it out sartin'."

The conspirators did not appear to be in any hurry to leave, and Jim Gloom stood watching the shanty for an hour on a stretch without hearing a sound, or seeing a movement.

It was getting colder as the night advanced, to say nothing of the lonesomeness of the place.

Jim had on a big buffalo robe overcoat, gloves and cap, besides a pair of rubber boots and a wool-en tippet, but even with all this, he began to feel as though he would like to get on the lee side of a big stove.

"Gorry! dem young rascals mus' hab a lot to talk 'bout! Wondah ef I kin heah anyfing? Mought have gone up to de do' long 'go, on'y I t'ought dey was comin' right out."

He sneaked up to the door and listened.

He could not hear a sound.

"Reckon dey am whisp'rin', or else de win' blows so I kean't heah nuffin'."

He could see the two figures on the curtain, but could not peep behind it, try as he would.

It seemed to have been nailed to the sash, for it was as tight as a drum-head, and Jim could not get the first squint behind it.

Then he listened, putting his ear close to the door, but still he heard nothing.

"I cotch um bumbye," he thought. "Jus' wait till dey come out. Den dey fin' me yer, an' dey is all cotched, eb'ry one ob dem."

It was a little warmer standing alongside the old shanty than out in the open, but it wasn't much to brag about after all.

Jim's big feet were turning to blocks of ice evidently, and his ears and nose were nearly devoid of feeling.

"Woo! Ef dey don' come out putty soon I bus' de do' open."

Then he began walking up and down before the house, thrashing his arms against his side to keep warm, but never losing sight of the house.

It would have been impossible for any one to have left without Jim's seeing them, so close a watch did he keep on it.

There was the light in the window still, and there were those two figures in the same position that they had occupied two hours before.

Finally Jim got desperate.

He couldn't wait any longer.

The town clock had just struck three, and he was as cold as an icicle.

He would discover the culprits at once.

With this idea in view he rushed up to the door and sent it flying open with one kick from his big right foot.

Then he dashed inside.

"I got yo' now, yo' young mischief makers, an' I'se gwine ter tell—"

He stopped when he had gone that far.

There wasn't a soul in the house. There was a lighted candle on the floor and a couple of sticks with hats on them standing in front of the window.

The room was about ten feet square and there was a rear door opposite the one by which Jim had entered.

It did not take even that stupid coon many minutes to see that he had been fooled.

The boys had come in, lighted the candle, placed the dummies in position and had then slid out by the back door while Jim was watching the front.

He had had his long vigil for nothing and might

He broke into a run the instant he saw it, and never stopped till he had passed the gate of his own place in his excitement.

"Fo' Gawge, dat ghos' didn't get me dis time!" he ejaculated, as he sneaked into the yard. "Reck-on he would, if I hadn' run so fas'. Drat dem boys! Spect de house am all shet up by dis time."

It was for a fact, for Swish had closed it up himself soon after the boys had come in.

However, Jim got into the barn, snuggled himself down in a big stack of hay, and snoozed the rest of the night.

Not only the rest of the night, moreover, but part of the morning as well, for he never woke up till past nine o'clock.

Well, after breakfast, little Tommy Bounce and his chums went out upon a tour of inspection.

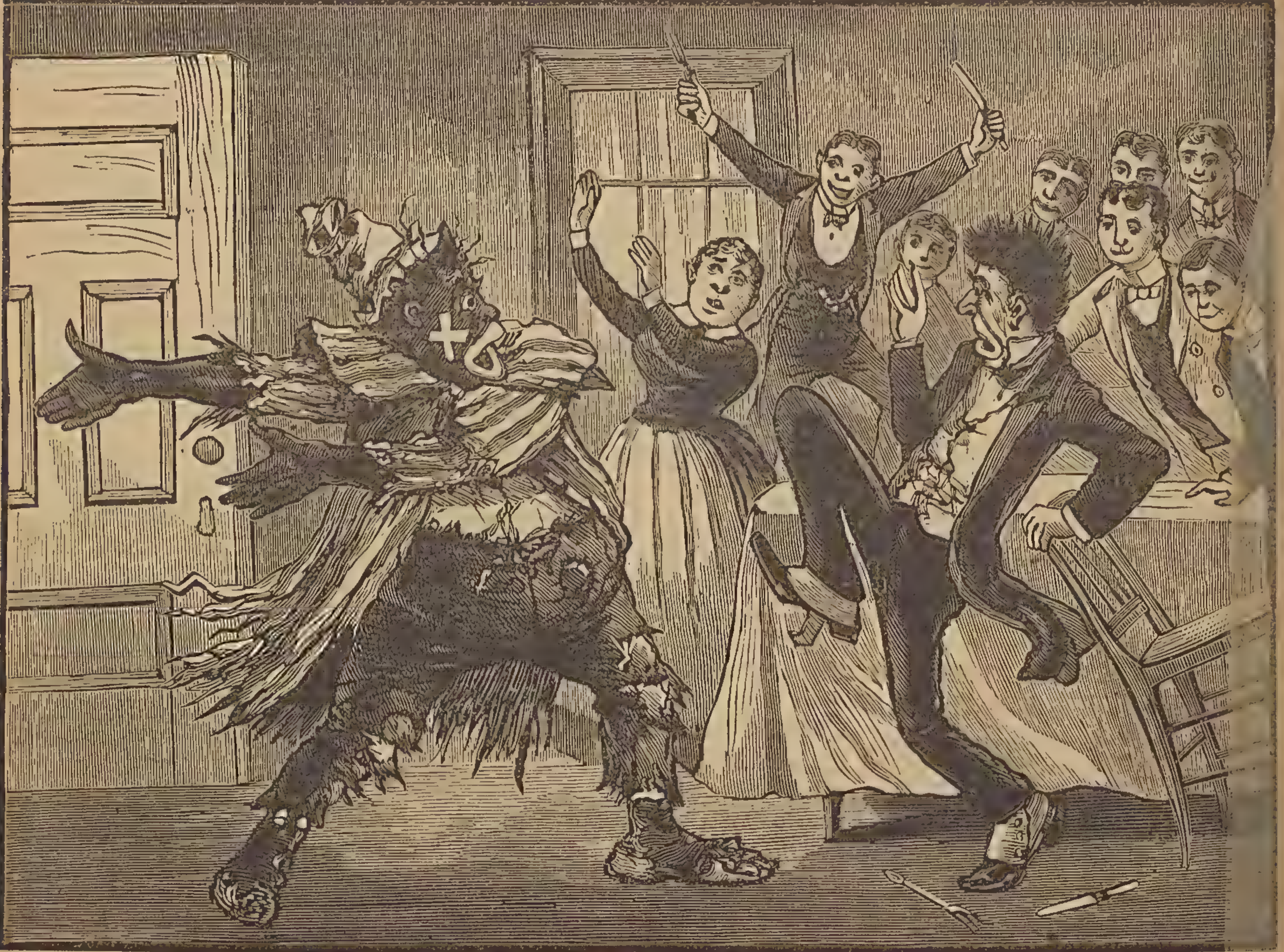
Tommy discovered the coon asleep in the hay, but said nothing.

Instead of that he went off and told his chums, and then got a lot of stout sticks.

Jim Gloom was enjoying a dandy old snooze when he suddenly began to dream that he was having a tussle with a threshing machine, and that the machine was getting rather the best of it.

"Give it to the tramp, boys," some one was saying. "Give it to him. We'll teach him to sneak in here and go to sleep."

"That's right. Thump the old tramp, fellows." Whack! whack!



"Oh, boss! here's fo'ty-leben robbers in de bahn," he burst out, "an' dey's gwine ter steal all de cows an hosses, an' all de waggins and eve'yting if yo' don' come putty quick."

ust as well have broken in upon the dummies in the first place.

When he finally tumbled he was mad enough.

The curtain was nothing but a big sheet of white paper tacked to the sash and the dummies did not have the least bit of clothing, the whole business having been so neatly arranged, however, that from the outside one would have sworn that there were two persons in the room.

"De imperance ob dem!" cried Jim, tearing down the white paper, overturning the two sticks and giving the candle a kick which sent it flying across the room and put it out.

Then he went out himself and sadly turned his feet toward home.

"T'ought suah I was gwine ter cotch 'em dis time. Nex' time I don' let 'em get out o' my sight, de young willins!"

It was colder than ever, and a walk of a mile at that late hour was not a very pleasant thing to contemplate.

Jim was superstitious like most darkies, and was on the lookout for ghosts and hobgoblins all the way home.

A sheet hanging on a line in front of a farmhouse nearly frightened the life out of him, as he took its flapping and waving to be the beckonings of a grisly specter.

Even then he would not have awakened if—but hold on a moment.

M'riar served the breakfast, as usual, but there was no Jim Gloom to wait on the table.

He and his swallow-tail coat failed to put in an appearance, and Swish was mad.

"That lazy nigger got in so late that he can't get up this morning, I suppose," he sputtered.

"But you know he was at a watch meeting, my dear," interposed Lady Swish.

"H'm, yes, watching somebody's chicken house to see if it was worth going into, I suppose. That fellow is no good. I would discharge him this minute, only—"

"Well?" for Swish had paused.

What he had meant to say was that the coon did more work for the money than any one else he could get.

He concluded not to say this, however, but added:

"Well, he has overdrawn his wages and I'll have to keep him till he has worked it out."

My lady said nothing, but she knew that this was a taradiddle all the same.

Catch Swish letting any one get the best of him on money matters.

Not many.

Biff! spat! whack!

Jim suddenly awakened to the realization that half a dozen fine, healthy boys were belaboring him with sticks for all they were worth.

"Give it to the tramp, boys!"

"This isn't a tramps' lodging-house, you old bum!"

"Get out of here, you snoozer, and think yourself lucky in not being locked up!"

Whack! whack! whack!

Jim was catching it in the rear, on the elbows, in the shins and across his noddle.

He suddenly jumped up and began yelling:

"Hol' on! Hol' on! Stop o' dat, yo' young wil-lins! Don' yo' know me? I'se no tramp! I'se Mistah Jeems Gloom!"

"Why, so it is!" yelled all the boys in chorus.

Then they let up on the thrashing, dropped the sticks and looked at Jim in amazement.

"Why, Mr. Gloom," said Tommy, with not the least suspicion of a smile, "how did you come to be out here?"

"H'm! reckon yo' know dat jes' as well as me," snorted Jim. "I'se onter yo', Mastah Tommy, an' some day you'll fin' yo'se'f bounced f'om dis place. Yo' took my advice an' quit dat foolin' or you'll git yo'se'f inter trouble."

"We're awfully sorry that we took you for a tramp, Mr. Gloom," said that sober Tommy.

"Awfully sorry, don't you know," echoed the boys.

"How were we to know it was you?"

"Yes, how could we?"

"Anybody might have made the same mistake."

"Of course they might."

"You'll excuse us this time, won't you, Mr. Gloom?"

"Of course he will?" shouted the chorus.

Then they all went out, leaving Jim to wonder if he would have to buy a bale of court plaster, or if a single package would suffice for his many bruises.

"Took me for a tramp, sleepin' in de hay, did dey! H'm! maybe dey did and maybe dey didn't. Yo' can't mos' allus tell wha' dem boys am tinkin' ob an' it am my opinyum dat dey did it a puppus!"

Well, this was the first day of the new year, and, of course, it must be celebrated.

Dinner would not be served till evening, but the boys could get a lunch at noon if they wanted it.

Tommy and his chums decided that they wanted more than that.

M'riar, the colored cook, was sitting in her kitchen, at noon, when there came a knock at the outer door.

"Wondah if dat am a callah?" she thought.

"Come in."

In walked half a dozen darky boys, and more were seen bringing up the rear.

"Wish Shappy New Year, M'riar!" they yelled.

"Won' yo' gib us suffin' to eat?"

"Fo' goodness sake!" ejaculated M'riar, "whar all dem col'd boys come f'om?"

For further information see small bills.

CHAPTER XI.

"Wish you a happy New Year, M'riar!" cried a dozen darky boys, suddenly bursting in upon the cook of the Swish establishment as she sat in the kitchen.

"Goodness me! whar all dem little niggahs come f'om?" cried M'riar, jumping up.

"Won' yo' gib us suffin' to eat? We're hungry. Shappy New Year!"

"Fo' de lan' sakes! feed a dozen little niggers! G'way, chillen, yo' brung on de famine!" cried the good-natured cook.

The "little niggers," by the way, were like charming young widows, and would not stay long in black.

In fact, they were none others than little Tommy Bounce and his chums, blacked up for this occasion only.

They all came in, joined hands and began dancing around M'riar, singing at the top of their voices.

"Fo' goodness' sake, chillen, whar yo' all come f'om, an' wha' yo' want?" cried the cook.

"Suffin' to eat!" yelled the crowd.

"Massy sakes! Yo' tink I got 'nuff to feed all yo' niggers? Sit right down and I gub yo' all a cake aplece an' yo's gotter be done sas'fied wif dat."

"We want pie," said Tommy.

"Pie!" yelled all the others.

"Goodness gracious! It'll took free pies to go roun'. Wha' yo' spee de boss say ef I gub away him grub like dat, h'm?"

"Blow the boss!" said Tommy, in his natural tones.

"Yes, blow the boss," echoed the rest.

"Well! ob all tings! Ef it ain' Mastah Tommy and him chums," cried M'riar.

"Come, cook, give us a bite and we'll sing for you," said Tommy. "We won't have dinner till night, and we're as hungry as bears now."

That fat, healthy, good-natured cook might not give away grub to a lot of real coons, but when she found out that they were little Tommy Bounce and his cronies, it was a rag of another color.

"Got right down yer, young ge'men," she said, pulling out the table, "an' I gub yo' de bes' lunch yo' eber had. Shan' say dat M'riar eber starbed any ob de young ge'men, no sah."

"Let's give her a Christmas carol, boys," said Tommy.

Then they all piped up and sang in a way that did the old soul's heart good and brought tears to her eyes.

"Clar' to gracious, chillun, ef I don't tink I'se gwine stret up to Hebben when I yar sech singin' as dat!" she exclaimed.

The boys gave her three or four songs and then wound up with something lively, which set her to dancing till she thought she would never be able to stop.

"Dar, dar, dat'll do!" she cried. "Ef yo' don' stop, yo' make me smash all de dishes. Sit right down and eat till yo' bus'."

Jim Gloom, hearing the racket, came around to

investigate, and found a dozen little niggers getting away with a free lunch.

"Hi, dar, yo' cook," he blustered; "wha' call yo' gotter feed all dem col'd boys? Did de boss done tole yo' ter?"

"No, he didn', an' it's no business ob yo'n ef he didn'."

"Reckon I see ef it ain'. Don' yo' know I got 'tire cha'ge ob dis place?"

"Yo' hasn' got 'tire cha'ge ob me, anyhow, niggah."

"Niggah yo' own se'f! I let de boss an' de mis-t'ess know how yo' waste all de wittles."

"Go jump on yourself, Jim," cried Tommy, getting outside of a big doughnut.

Gloom turned around and looked outside, for, as he could not see Tommy in the kitchen, he thought he must be out of doors.

Then Bob Smiley took him in the back of the neck with a dish-cloth and made him feel dreadful tired.

When he turned around the boys were all enjoying themselves.

"Who frow dat dish-rag?" he asked, angrily.

"Ef I cotch him I frow um out de winder."

"Yes, you will, a fat lot!" said Tommy, and Gloom turned again, only to get it in the ear with a cake of soap.

"Get out ob yer!" he cried. "Ain' gwine to hab yo' in de house. Jes' yo' git right out!"

"Let's have some fun with him, boys," whispered Tommy. "He'll never know the diff."

Then, instead of Jim Gloom charging the boys, the boys made an assault on Jim.

They rushed him out of that kitchen in double-quick time, and upset him in a snow-bank outside.

He was big and strong, and all that, but what could one coon do against a dozen lively boys?

They rolled him over in the snow, which stuck to him till he began to resemble a big snow-ball with a head sticking out of it more than anything else.

Finally he began to yell and kick so that the boys all dusted, and left him to get out the best way he could.

Besides the black was beginning to come off their hands and faces, and as that would have given them away they concluded to take a vacation.

When Jim finally got out of the snow all those little niggers had disappeared and not a trace of them could be seen.

If Jim could have seen the wash basins in Number Six, he might have hazarded a guess as to what had become of them, but he did not and was therefore left in ignorance.

Having washed up, the boys reappeared on the scene and looked very much surprised at Jim's condition.

He was blowing his fingers to get them warm and occasionally shaking himself to dislodge some snow or ice that had gone down his neck.

"What's the matter, Mr. Gloom?" asked Tommy in all seriousness.

"Nice boys yo' is, to let a mob ob col'd brats come yer an' took familiarities wif me," growled the coon.

"Who's been doing it?"

"Lot ob young niggers. Dey took liberties wif me, dey did. Reckon ef yo' car'd fo' me jes' a lilly bit, yo' come down an' drub 'em off."

"Where did they come from?"

"Don' know. Spees dey's some ob de cook's po' relations. Shouldn' flink yo' boys would let 'em come on de place ef yo' had any 'spect fo' yo'selves or fo' me."

"Ain't you big enough to take care of three or four coons?"

"Free or fo'! Dey was free or fo' dozen, dat's what dey was, an' aftah eatin' up ev'ryting in de ho'se, dey jes' trankled me in de snow, dat's wha' dey did."

"Well, if we see them we'll pull their wool for them," said Tommy, gravely, and then he and the gang went off to find some more fun.

That big coon had no notion of staying in all day on New Year's, and decided to go off calling upon his colored friends of the female persuasion.

He did not think it worth while to say anything to Swish about it, however.

The fact was, he desired to cut a swell in that dizzy, dress-suit of his, which he was not supposed to wear outside of the house.

Of course, if he let Swish know of the affair, the latter would certainly object to his going off in any such rig.

Jim was a law unto himself, in this case, and so he went off and never mentioned it to any one.

Dressed in his swell suit, with a big buffalo robe coat, fur gloves and a coonskin cap, Jim sneaked away early in the afternoon, taking the single cutter and one of the horses.

He could not think of making New Year's calls on foot, of course, and hence the horse and sleigh.

He was a great masher, was Jim Gloom, and knew a number of buxom wenches, well-to-do

widows and eligible single ladies of color, all of whom were receiving their friends that day.

Talk about style!

That coon was just overflowing with it.

There wasn't a nig in all Darktown that could come up to him.

At the first place he stopped, Miss Lucinda Angelcake and her two sisters were receiving, and Jim found half a dozen dandy mokes in the parlor when he went in.

His nobby get-up just took the biscuit, and the ladies monopolized him at once.

"Won' you hab a glass ob wine, Mistah Gloom?" asked the dusky Lucinda. "We made it our own-selbs, an' it won' hu't yo'."

Would he take a glass of wine?

Wouldn't he just?

Not only one glass but the whole decanter, before he finished his call.

Next he went to see Mis' Creamtart, a buxom widow who was reputed to have seventy-five dollars in her own right, owned a piece of waste land down by the river and controlled the best paying washing-and-ironing route in town.

The widow was assisted by three lovely black-and-tan beauties, her sister's children, and of course Jim was in high feather again.

Here he had hard cider offered him but he never refused anything spirituous and prolonged his call until he had drank the health of each of his hostesses.

Anybody else would have been getting full by this time, but Jim Gloom's capacity was as big as he was.

However, by the time he had taken in the whole of Darktown and several houses in the adjacent coon settlement, he was pretty well loaded.

It was now seven o'clock, and he ought to have been home an hour before.

"Guess de boss kin wait on he'sef fo' once," he remarked, as he got into the cutter at last and started for home.

There was a good moon, the roads were hard and well trodden, and there ought not to have been any obstacle to his getting home all right.

Maybe it was the combination distillery in his stomach that made things go wrong.

In fact we are inclined to believe that it was.

At any rate, he had not driven forty rods before he ran up against a snow bank at the side of the road.

Over went the cutter, out went Jim Gloom into the snow head first, and then off scooted the horse.

The cutter righted as soon as Jim went out, but the horse never stopped as soon as he found things were all serene.

He knew the way, took the middle of the road and went off at a canter, the sleigh-bells sounding most tantalizingly in Jim's ears.

"Whoa dar, Jerry!" he shouted, but Jerry neither heard nor stopped, but kept on at the same even pace.

"Neber did see de beat ob dat hoss," muttered Gloom, getting up and shaking himself. "He got ter run away jes' now, when he mighter done it any time dis arternoon an' I wouldn't say nuffin'."

He had a two or three mile walk before him, and he didn't fancy it for a penny.

Still, there was no help for it, and he might as well make the best of a bad bargain.

His gait was none of the steadiest, but he kept on, hoping that it would improve.

It got worse, if anything.

There was light enough, in all conscience, but somehow or another he could not see to walk straight for the life of him.

The first he knew he was away over to the side of the road, all tangled up in a rail fence.

When he got out of that he presently found himself on the other side of the road mixed in with a lot of brier bushes.

Then he got in the middle of the road again, but something tripped him up, and he measured his length in the snow.

"Neber did see sech elckery walkin' in all my bo'n days," he growled. "Wha' fo' dat hoss want-er run away I'd like ter know?"

Up he got, but he had not gone more than a hundred feet before he found himself hanging to a rail fence by his suspenders.

"B'lebe de bery mischief am to pay wif dis road," he snarled. "Yo' can't walk straight to sabe yo' neck. Reckon I'd lay it out bettah ef I'd had de job. Neber see sech a crooked road."

He got clear of the fence, but fell over a heap of stones a little further on, and burst the whole back seam of his dress coat.

A little later he barked his nose against a guide-post, although it was big enough to be seen half a mile away.

What with his many mishaps his clothes were a sight to see before he was half way home, and things did not improve any after that.

Of course he did not show up at dinner time, but Swish made no mention of the fact, and things went on as usual.

Little Tommy Bounce suspected that he was off somewhere on a toot, but did not suspect where until the horse came in with the cutter but no Gloom.

Tommy and one or two others saw the nag come in, and then they tumbled.

They took the horse out, gave him his supper, put him in his stall, ran the sleigh in under a shed, and then watched for Jim.

He came along soon after eight o'clock, very tired, twice as cross and as boozy as an owl.

At this time Swish and his wife were sitting in their own parlor enjoying each other's society, to say nothing of a jug of cider and a big dish of raised doughnuts.

"Conceited, gin-guzzling old fool of an ape, and that he ought to have fired you long ago."

"H'm! I is, is I? Who say dat?"

"Who do you suppose?"

"De boss?"

"Of course."

"He say all dat?" asked Jim, getting up.

"Yes, and lots more. He says you write poetry, steal chickens, ride a bicycle, dance with white trash, eat salt, shirk your work wear paper collars and smoke cigarettes."

"Dat settles it! I jes' go right down dere an' call him to 'count dis bery miunit."

He was tolerably steady on his feet now, and the

"I'se a drunken nigger, an' I don' 'arn my salt, hey?"

This time a big picture hanging on the wall was sent to everlasting smash.

"Weah papah collars, does I?"

A companion picture now went.

"Guzzle gin, too, yo' say?"

Over went two of the chairs.

"And steal chickens?"

A table was kicked clean across the room and upset.

"I'se robbin' yo' by takin' yo' wages an' doin' nuffin', is I?"

Away went the lamp, shade, chimney, globe and



All the ornaments had been swept from the shelves; three or four fancy brackets with busts on them were utterly busted; the table and chairs were all upset, the pictures were all askew, and the glass smashed, and rubbish of all kinds littered the floor.

Jim Gloom went straight to his room, threw off his overcoat and cap and stretched himself out in a big arm-chair that he had swiped from Swish.

In a few seconds he was dozing.

The boys had no notion of letting him keep it up, however.

Tommy stood out in the hall while Bob threw the door open.

Then imitating the high strung tones of Mr. Strapper, that young rascal exclaimed:

"Jim Gloom, hi, Jim Gloom! Wake up and hear what the boss says about you."

"Wha' dat?" muttered Jim, half awake.

"He says you're a lazy, drunken nigger, to begin with."

"Who say dat?" demanded Jim, a little more attentive.

"And that it's a shame to pay you wages for doing nothing."

"What dat, sah?" and now Jim was pretty tolerably awake.

"He says that you are no good, and that you are no better than a robber to take his money and do no work for it. He says, too, that you are a lazy, shiftless, drunken, idle, good-for-nothing—"

Jim was wide awake now and no dodging.

"Who say all dat, Mistah Strappah?" he asked.

boys had to skip out pretty lively to avoid being caught as he emerged from his room.

"Guess I ain' gwine ter let dat man 'sult a col'd gemmen if he am de boss ob de place," he muttered as he sallied forth.

On the lower floor he found a broom standing in a corner and collared on to it at once.

If Tommy had seen this he would have contrived to get it away from the angry coon, but he did not.

Hence what follows.

Swish and his wife were sitting alone in their parlor when the door suddenly flew open with a bang and in dashed Jim Gloom.

He came in like a blast from the north, and in his hand he carried a broom.

His clothes were torn and disarranged, and his face and head had more bumps than a phrenologist ever dreamed of.

"I'se a drunken loafah, is I?" was his first question.

Then he swept the jug of cider and the plate of doughnuts off the table at one sweep.

"I'se a lazy, shifless an' good fo' nuffin' niggah, is I?"

Two big vases and a clock went flying off the mantel by way of emphasis.

Maybe you think that Mr. and Mrs. Swish were sitting there quietly while this storm was raging.

You can gamble your overshoes that they were not.

They both jumped up, retreated to a corner and stood there, utterly paralyzed.

Jim Gloom went on with his work of cleaning out the place.

It was a wreck now, but he had not finished by a large majority.

All the ornaments had been swept from the shelves; three or four fancy brackets with busts on them were utterly busted, the table and chairs were all upset, the pictures were all askew, and the glass smashed, and rubbish of all kinds littered the floor.

"Dance wif white trash, do I?" continued Gloom.

Over went the stove, throwing a pile of coals out upon the stone hearth.

Mrs. Swish shrieked, and Swish wrung his hands.

"What ails the man? He must be crazy."

"Orter been flahed out long ago, had I?"

Smash went three or four panes of glass.

"I'se a conceited ole ape, h'm?"

Down came two pairs of lace curtains, gilt cornices and all.

"Writes vusses, does I?"

A hanging book-shelf, with a lot of rare volumes on it, was the next article to be knocked down.

"Rides on bisickle, too, hey?"

The portrait of Swish's grandfather now had his left eye bunged out.

"Insult a col'd ge'man wif impurity, will yo'?"

There wasn't anything else to smash, so Jim gave Swish a wipe over the head with the broom.

Mrs. Swish was shrieking with fright and her husband was half scared to death.

When all the mischief had been done that could be, the police arrived upon the scene.

That is to say, Tommy and the boys, Lick and Strapper and M'riar and a friend whom she was entertaining in the kitchen, all came rushing in.

The noise had attracted them and they knew that something was wrong.

Jim Gloom had certainly made the most of his time.

Even Tommy Bounce was startled at the wreck that had been done.

"Golly! that's more than I expected," he thought to himself.

The gang surrounded and disarmed Jim Gloom first of all.

Then the stove was set up and one or two coals that had fallen on the carpet put out.

Fortunately the house was not set on fire but, otherwise, the parlor was a total wreck.

"What's it all about?" squeaked Strapper, as the big coon was being dragged away.

"Yo' orter know," snapped Jim. "Yo' gub me all de pints. Reckon de boss don't say no mo' agin my crackter."

"Take him away, he's crazy drunk!" roared Swish. "He won't be able to pay for the damage he's done if I keep back his wages for five years."

Then Jim was lugged off and locked up in the coal cellar, where he was left all night, to muse upon his sins.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN the damage done by Jim Gloom came to be reckoned up, it was found to amount to only about fifty dollars.

There were panes of glass to be put in, picture frames to be mended, a clock to be repaired, new vases to be bought, a lamp to be purchased, several new dishes to be got, and a yard or two of carpet for patches.

Much of the damage could be easily repaired, of course, and at no greater expense than putting certain articles back in their places.

The money absolutely needed to fix things up, however, amounted to fifty dollars, and as Little Tommy Bounce considered himself to be the party responsible for the damage, he determined to make it up to old Swish, and then beg for Jim Gloom's reinstatement.

Of course Jim was fired, but the boys all went to Swish in a body and begged him so earnestly to take the coon back that at last he consented.

"Who is going to pay for all the things he has destroyed?" demanded Swish.

"His friends have promised to make it up," said Tommy.

"H'm, yes! they haven't any too much cash themselves."

"Well, Jim has some of his own, and they will make up the rest."

"I can't have a drunken man about my place. Think of the bad example he sets."

"Mr. Gloom has taken the pledge."

"Well, if he behaves himself, I am willing to take him back, but I don't believe his friends will want to pay out so much money."

"How much will it come to?"

"H'm, yes, well, I guess fifty dollars will put things back as they were."

"All right, sir, I will get the money for you this afternoon."

Tommy took up a subscription among his chums, and secured twenty-five dollars, to which he added the same amount from his own barrel, and handed the whole business to old Swish as the price of Jim Gloom's reinstatement.

When the boss saw how soon the money was raised he wanted to club himself for not putting it at a higher figure.

"I'll bet the boys raised the money among themselves," he said. "They all like Gloom, and were willing to pay for the damage in order to keep him here. Wish now I'd made it seventy-five or a hundred instead of fifty."

As for Jim himself he failed to see that he had done anything so very wrong, considering the provocation.

"De boss got no call to 'sult me ef I is brack," he declared. "Mebbe it wasn't right to smash up nothing, but when a man an' all ob wraff an

ha'd cider, dere am no 'countin' fo' wha' he may do."

Jim remained, the holidays came to an end, the absent boys returned and things went along the same as before.

When the next full moon came to town Tommy gathered his particular and especial cronies about him, and divulged to them, under promise of the utmost secrecy, his newest job on Jim Gloom.

It was intended to just take the gloss out of a paper collar and all hands agreed to give it a medal.

That afternoon, when school was out, Tommy went up to Jim Gloom, the coon being engaged in feeding the chickens, and said:

"Hush! Don't say a word!"

"Wha' yo' mean by dat, Mistah Tommy?" said Jim, opening his eyse.

"Sh! sh! don't tell a soul," said Tommy, more impressively than ever.

"Don't see how I se gwine ter tell anybody ef I don't know nuffin' to tell 'em Mistah Tommy."

"This house is going o be robbed to-night!" cried Tommy, seizing Jim suddenly by the arm.

The coon started, two or three quarts of corn were spilled out of the measure he held, and the chickens had a picnic.

"Fo' hebben's sake, how yo' know dat, Mistah Tommy?"

"I heard the villains plotting to do it."

"Rob dis house?"

"Yes."

"When dey comin'?"

"To-night at eleven, when all hands are in bed."

"Den dey am big fools. It's gwine ter be bright moonlight to-night."

"Well, they're coming, at any rate, and they are going to get in by the rear cellar window."

"Yo' heah all dis?"

"Yes. They were talking behind some bushes and didn't see me, and I heard the whole business."

"How many am dey, Mistah Tommy?"

"Only two."

"Wull!" grunted Gloom, "ef I isn't a match fo' any two tramps, den I jus' wants tu know it."

Tommy thought of the joke that two other tramps had put up on the coon at Christmas, but he said nothing.

"Jes' yo' keep still about dis yer, Mistah Tommy," continued Gloom, "an' I fix dem tramps so dey won't wan' ter fool wif me agin."

"That's right, Jim. Of course we can't have the house robbed."

"Ob co'se not, an' yo' done jes' right to tell me, son. Now dis gibbs me a chance to show de boss dat I ain't sech a bad fellah, aftah all."

"He'll be sure to raise your wages after this, Mr. Gloom."

"Tain't no mo'n right ef he do."

That night at eleven o'clock Jim Gloom sneaked out of the house and around to the back door.

Nobody was in sight, but Jim thought he heard a suspicious sound in the cellar.

He stole up, and at that moment the window was raised.

"That you, Bill?" asked a hoarse voice.

"Reckon dat am one ob dem," thought Jim.

"How he get in de sullen, I like to know."

"Yes, it's me," he said, trying to disguise his voice by whispering.

It was as dark as a dog's throat in the cellar, and as light as day nearly outside, so that while Jim could see nothing of those within, they could see him first-rate.

"Are you ready?" asked the voice again. "Here, take this."

An old broken-down chair came out, and Jim put it on the ground beside the window.

"May's well make de feller flink his chum am heah," mused Jim. "Won't I cotch 'em bofe putty soon?"

"Hallo! here's something else, Bill. Stand by to take it."

Out came a ham, and then another and another and another as fast as Jim could take them.

"Guess dey means to have sump'n' to eat dis winter. Reckon all de hams in de sullen am comin' out."

"Stand by there, Bill, I'm in a hurry."

Then came more hams, and so fast that Jim had hardly time to put one on the pile before another came out.

"Here you go! Look out for this!"

This time it was a barrel of flour which Jim stood beside the hams.

One of sugar followed, and then two more of flour.

Then came two or three filled with coal, and Jim grunted when he took them out.

"My goodness, dey mus' hab a cart if dey 'spect to take all dese tings away."

There wasn't any time for reflection, however. The stuff was coming out too fast for that.

Out came a box full of cold mince-pies, which M'riar had made and stored away for use as she wanted them.

Then came a lot of single pies, twenty or thirty, one at a time, but so quickly that Jim had hard work to manage them.

Then came a lot of cabbages, ditto winter squashes, and a barrel or two of apples.

Then four or five barrels of potatoes came up and then more coal, flour and sugar in barrels, separate, of course.

"Pears to me dey'll wan' a truck 'stead ob a cyart," grunted Jim, beginning to sweat. "Dem fellahs'll get ten yeahs fo' dis, shuah!"

Then came out a lot of cord-wood, a stick at a time, as fast as the coon could take it.

This was an extra lot that there was no room for in the wood-shed, and it had been stored in the cellar instead.

Then when two or three cords of wood had come out, the contributions began to be more miscellaneous in their character.

First came an old desk with the lid busted off.

Then a lot of half-burned oil-cloth in a roll.

A lot of rusty stove-pipe.

A stove.

A watering-pot.

Forty feet of hose.

Two old umbrellas.

A stuffed alligator.

An iron bedstead.

A churn.

Then came a little of everything.

"Reckon I make a mistook ag'in," sputtered Jim. "Dey wants a railroad kyar to take dis away. No waggin am big 'nuff."

"Here—here! hurry up, Bill; there's more stuff yet."

More!

Where under the sun could the coon put it?

There were piles and piles of stuff all around him now.

If anything else came out, he would have to put it in the road.

More old desks, a lot of settees, a worn-out mattress, a broken table, half a dozen chairs, some maps, made before the war, more wood, coal and flour, garden tools, bags of coffee, chests of tea, boxes of raisins, cases of canned goods, and a ten gallon can of molasses.

"Fo' massy sakes, dey'll clean out de hull sullen! Why don't dey take de ho'se away on rollers? Reckon dey ain't much left."

"Here you go, Bill!"

"What! Some mo'! Guess dey wan' de earl!"

"Here you are!"

This time it was an old and very much dilapidated terrestrial globe, which had long outlived its usefulness, and had been tucked away in the cellar to gather dust as the years rolled by.

Jim Gloom looked at it as he set it down in the only clear space he had left, and remarked:

"Wull! I said yo' wanted de earl, an' heah it am. Couldn't yo' hitch two or free yoke ob oxes to de ho'se an' tote it off? Yo' got eberyting else, I reckon."

"Wait a minute, Bill, and I'll come up and help ou get the stuff away."

Wait a minute!

Oh, yes, to be sure he would.

"Wondah whar de oder fellah am? Like to cotch de bofe ob dem, but I get dis yer one anyhow."

So Jim waited.

And continued to wait.

And suddenly kept on waiting.

He waited and he waited, but that robber never came.

The great round moon slowly traveled up the heavens till it got to the top and saw that big coon waiting at the window for the burglar to come out.

Then that same moon began to slide down toward the horizon, but still there was no burglar.

Jim kept up his vigil, however.

He was bound to collar that burglar, no matter how long he had to wait.

The moon sank behind the hills and all was dark and still the coon waited.

Then a gray light appeared in the East, then a warm glow, and then a warmer one and finally a white light shot up in the heavens.

There sat Jim Gloom fast asleep on a flour barrel when the sun came up.

What about the burglars?

Why, they had gone to bed hours before and were up-stairs now, still snoozing.

When they had passed out the earth they went up the cellar stairs, locked the door and went up to the dormitories.

Poor Jim!

He never tumbled.

Little Tommy Bounce, Bob Smiley, Dick Tucker, Joe Waters, Sam Sloan, Ben Dunn and half a score besides were the burglars.

That's how the things came out so fast and so easily.

Pretty soon, when the sun shone in his eyes, Jim awoke.

At first he couldn't account for all the stuff around him.

"What am dis? De boss put out fo' not paying him rent?"

Then he remembered.

"Fo' Gawge! I let dem burglars get away f'om me!"

Then he looked at the stuff.

"All dat gotter go down culler! Wow! What time I git to do my wo'k to-day, I like to know?"

Even yet he did not tumble.

He opened the cellar doors from the inside, and began to cart the stuff back.

"Wha' fo', boss?"

"Why, you everlasting idiot, there weren't any burglars at all."

"Dere was one, boss. He pass out de t'ings."

"One! It took a dozen to pass out all that stuff. Jim, the boys have made a fool of you again."

"De young ge'men, boss?"

"M', yes, that's what we call them when we want to be sarcastic, Gloom. They can tell you who the burglars are, I guess."

Gloom was carrying a ham at that moment.

In his surprise he let it fall on the schoolmaster's foot.

"Wull, ob all t'ings! Bet dat little Tommy Bounce put up de job on me all de time. He

vinced that Bounce is at the bottom of the whole business."

"But you can't expel Bounce, Mr. Swish."

"Not give Master Tommy the bounce, my dear?"

"Certainly not."

"What is the objection, my love?"

"His father pays all his bills with the utmost promptness."

"Exactly so, my dear, and it happens that Bounce, Sr., has paid Bounce, Jr.'s tuition and board bills up to the first of April. I think that I can very well afford to let him go, my dear."

"But if you wait a little while longer, you will get it for the spring term as well."



There sat Jim Gloom fast asleep on a flour barrel when the sun came up. What about the burglars? Why, they had gone to bed hours before and were up-stairs now, still snoozing.

The breakfast bell rang, and he hadn't got rid of half of it.

Swish heard the racket, stuck his head out of a window and said:

"What are you doing, you old fool? Who ordered all that stuff?"

"Nobody o'dahed it, boss. I'se puttin' it back."

"Putting it back?"

"Yas, boss."

"How did it come out there, in the name of mischief?"

"De robbahs, boss."

"What robbers?"

"De robbahs what come yer las' night. I laid fo' dem, but couldn't coteh 'em."

Swish said no more, but when he had eaten his hash, he went out and interviewed the coon.

Jim did not have anything like all the stuff in even then.

Swish put a few leading questions, and the coon answered them.

Then Swish began to laugh.

The more he laughed, the more he wanted to.

He howled, he slapped his sides, he doubled over, he nearly had a fit.

"Ho-ho-ho! Well, if you ain't the biggest fool nigger I ever saw," roared Swish.

done tol' me de robbahs was comin' he own se'f."

"Bounce told you that the burglars were coming?"

"Yas, boss, an' tol' me ter watch fo' dem at dat winder at 'leben o'clock."

"How did he know it?"

"Sayed he heerd de fellahs talking 'bout it be-hin' de bushes."

Then Swish began to laugh again as if he never would stop.

"Put the rest of the he-he-he-he stuff back in the ha-ha-ha-ha cellar, Jim, and then ho-ho-ho-ho-ho, ha-ha, hi-hi, he-he-he! Oh, Lord, if you don't beat ho-ho creation. Oh, Jim, you big fool!"

He ran into the house still laughing, and Jim stood looking after him.

"So! Dis am anoder ob dat bad boy's jokes, am it? An' de boss, he tink it am so funny he kean't spoke! Reckon ef he hab to tote all dat yer stuff back to de sullen, he fail to see all de facetiousness-ness-ness-ness!"

When Swish got over laughing at Jim he said to his wife:

"The mischief increases every day, and somebody must be made an example of. I am con-

"Yes, and have the whole school in an uproar. I never knew so much mischief to be done in four years as has gone on since Bounce came."

"Well, see if you can't get some more money out of him first."

"I am afraid I can't work it, but I'll try."

Consequently, Swish said nothing to Tommy or the rest of the boys, and matters went on as before.

A week passed, during which all sorts of jobs were put up.

One night the school-bell was rung like mad, awakening all hands in the house and bringing out the village fire department to see what the matter was.

The next night one of the mules was taken out of the stable and put in the school-room, where he was found the next day, tied to Swish's desk.

Then somebody rubbed grease over every black-board in the place, and nobody could make a mark on them, to save their skins.

Again Jim Gloom awoke in a terrible fright one night, and found a calf in his bed, which so broke him up that he nearly fell down-stairs, and succeeded in arousing the whole house.

Then some one put whisky in the tea used at the professor's table, and Strapper and Lick were

so overcome that when they awoke it was discovered that somebody had shaved the hair off of one side of their heads, leaving it long on the other side.

Then one morning when Swish sat down he fell on the floor, the legs of his chair having been sawed nearly in two.

That settled it.

A saw was found in Tommy's desk, the young joker having neglected to remove it.

Swish called Tommy up before the whole gang and said:

"Bounce, you are at the bottom of all the mischief that has been done here for the last six months."

Tommy said nothing, but looked as solemn as an owl.

"Don't attempt to deny it, sir!" thundered Swish.

Tommy didn't.

"Did you saw the legs of my chair?"

Tommy nodded.

"Didn't you put up that robber snap on Jim Gloom?"

Some more nods.

"And ring the school-bell?"

Another nod.

"And grease the blackboards?"

Tommy signified assent.

"And lots more things, too, I suppose?" said Swish, getting mad.

"Well, yes, I've tried to liven up the place a bit," answered Tommy, with never a wink.

"You must have had help in carrying out your jokes?"

Tommy kept his mouth shut tight.

"I say that you must have had some one to help you."

"Think so?"

"You couldn't have done it all alone?"

"No?"

"Of course not. Who were the others engaged?"

"Engaged in what, sir?"

"In the mischief."

"I ain't giving anything away," said that cool youth.

"Do you know what I will do if you don't tell me the names of your accomplices?"

"I can guess."

"You will be sent away."

"Shall I go and pack up now?" asked the imperturbable Tommy.

"Then you won't tell me their names."

"No, sir."

"Not to save yourself from expulsion?"

"No, sir."

The boys all voted Tommy a brick for sticking it out.

"Then you are expelled, and I will write to your father at once."

"I'll save you the trouble, and write to him myself."

"And you can get ready to leave at once."

Thereupon Bob Smiley jumped to his feet, and cried out:

"I say, sir, I don't think it's square to expel Tommy Bounce when there are others who did just as much as he did. I'm one of them myself, and—"

"So am I!" cried Dick.

"Me too!" added Joe.

Several others jumped up, when Tommy said quietly:

"Never mind, boys, I don't mind going away. It's too dull here all the year around. I shall be glad to see some new places."

"Master Bounce, I consider you the ringleader, and shall send you away unless you promise to do better," said Swish, backing down when he saw that the boys all stood by Tommy.

"Oh, I'd just as lief go now as later," answered Tommy. "I'll telegraph to father at once."

The young joker went to town in the cutter, and telegraphed to his father as follows:

"DEAR POP,—Old Swish wants to fire me out for cutting up. Please wire instructions."

"TOMMY."

In an hour or so this answer come over the wires:

"Come home as soon as convenient. Am going to send you traveling for a year or so. FATHER."

"Why, now, that's boss," said Tommy. "It's just the cheese."

When he got back to the school Tommy found the big coon, and said to him:

"Jim, I am going away. Are you glad?"

"No, sah, I isn't. I'se bery sorry. I'd rudder see any oder feller go dan yo', Mistah Tommy."

"Would you like to go with me, Jim, as my valet, coachman and what not? I am going to travel and shall want some one."

"Trabel wif yo', sah?"

"That's it. I'll give you twenty dollars a month and your expenses."

"Yo' want a man to look arter yo' trunks, wait on table, an' do all dem tings?"

"Pretty much that."

"Kin I hab de job, Mistah Tommy?" cried Jim, his eyes starting out of his head.

"I'm offering it to you, Jim."

"Den I took it, sah."

"All right. I shall leave by the first train tomorrow."

"I be ready, Mistah Tommy, you bet."

"Can you get a man to take your place here?"

"M'riar knows a coon wha' jus' jumpin' fo' de chance."

"Then that's all right. Go tell his royal joblots that you have entered my service."

Early the next morning little Tommy Bounce and Jim Gloom, Esq., left the Swish establishment amid the congratulations and good wishes of all the boys.

They would all miss the two friends, but Tommy promised to write to them all and tell them how he and Jim got on.

For a brief space, then, let us take leave of our roguish young friend, though I promise you that when you next see him he will be more like his dad than ever.

[THE END.]

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